RACHEL KUSHNER ON BRET EASTON ELLIS

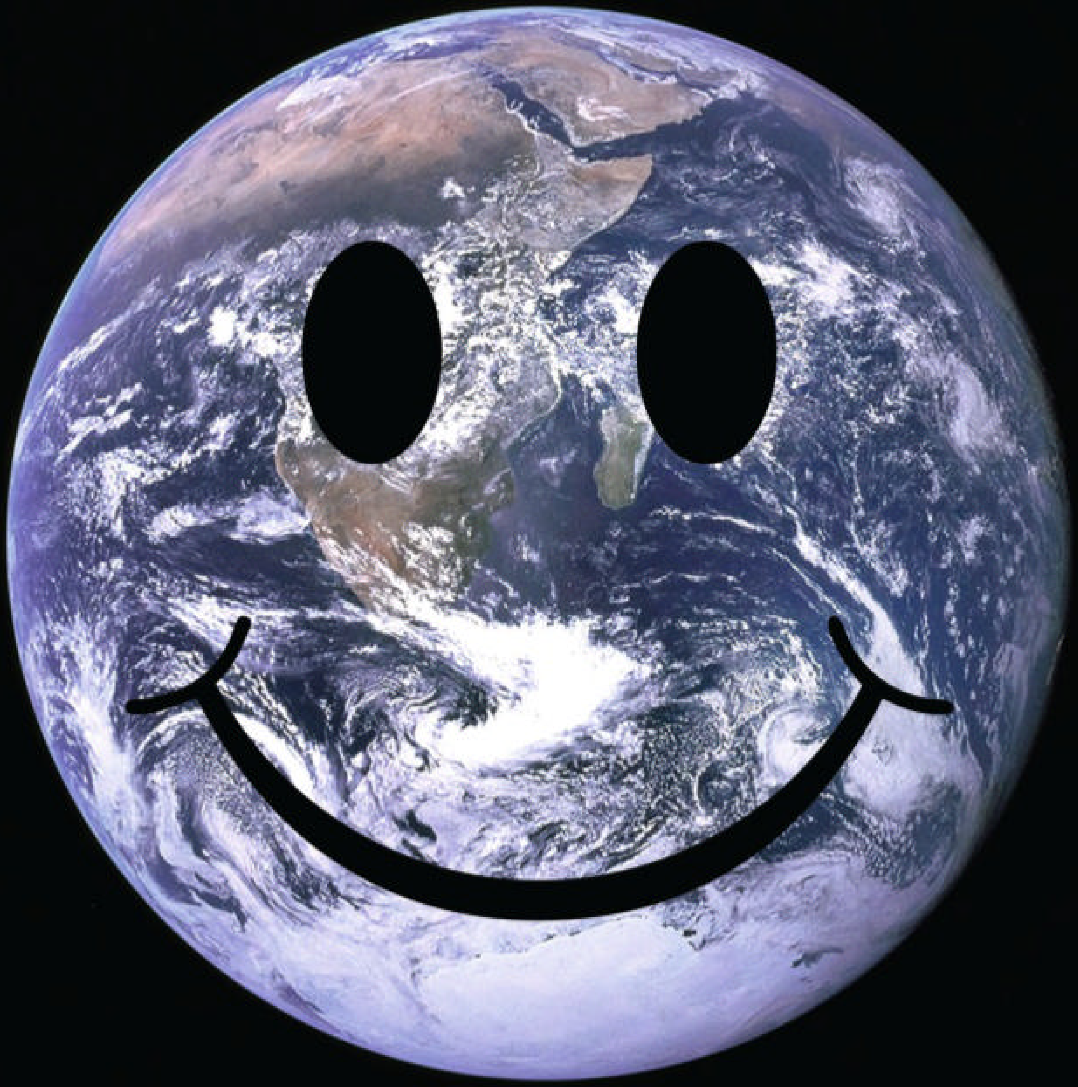
HARPER'S

HARPER'S MAGAZINE/APRIL 2023 $7.99

THE INCREDIBLE DISAPPEARING DOOMSDAY

How the Media Stopped Worrying about Climate Change

by Kyle Paoletta



DOES ANYBODY
REALLY KNOW
WHAT TIME IT IS?

THE ENDURING
ALLURE OF
PILGRIMAGE

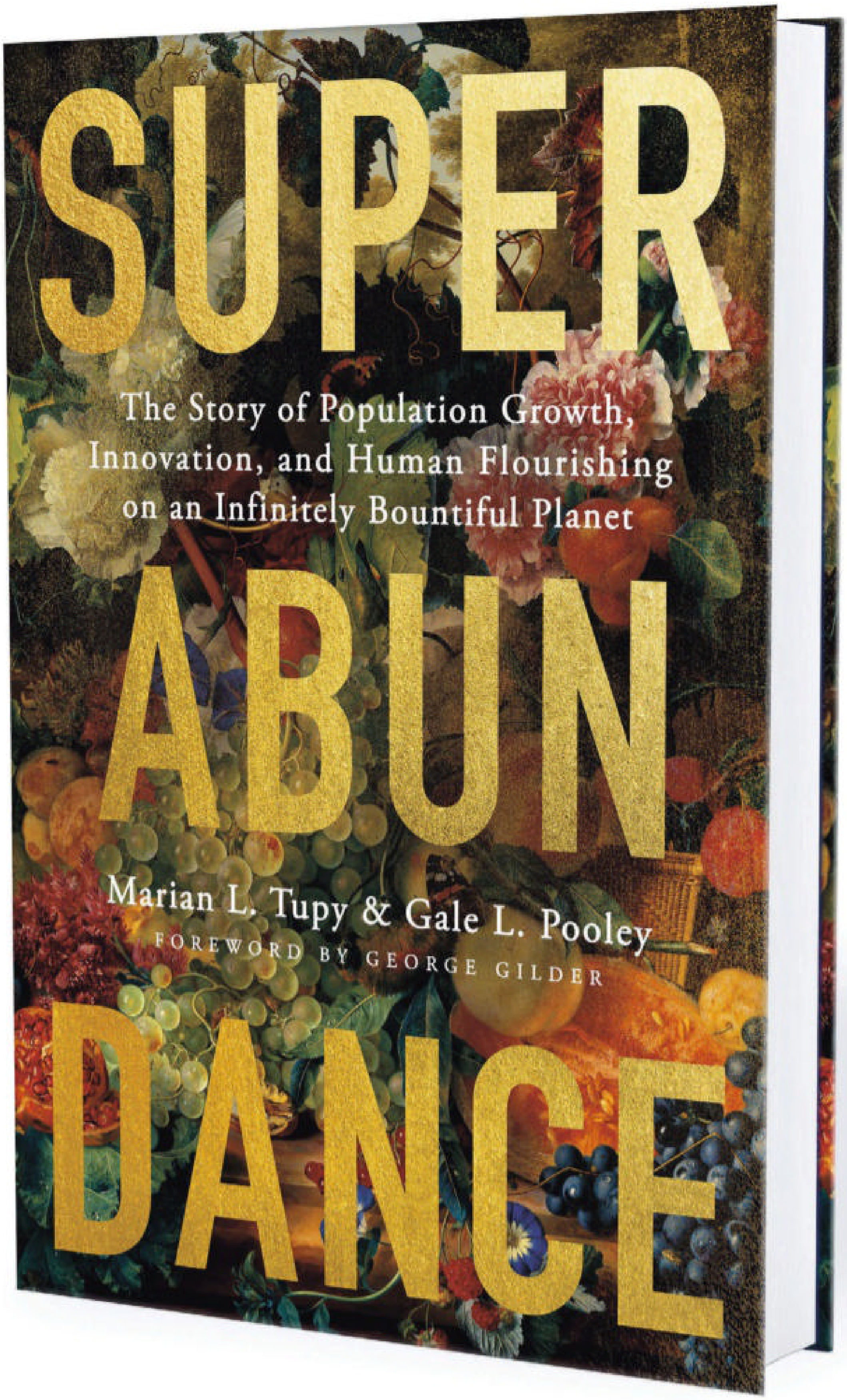
VISIT…

LANZAROTE

Caliente.COM

“This book demonstrates that population growth is not a problem; it is the solution—the most important resource.”

—**GEORGE WILL,** ***WASHINGTON POST***


SUPER
The Story of Population Growth, Innovation, and Human Flourishing on an Infinitely Bountiful Planet
ABUN
Marian L. Tupy & Gale L. Pooley
FOREWORD BY GEORGE GILDER
DANCE

Generations of people have been taught that population growth makes resources scarcer. However, after analyzing the prices of hundreds of commodities, goods, and services spanning two centuries, authors Marian Tupy and Gale Pooley found that not only did resources become more abundant as the population grew, but that resource abundance increased faster than the population—a relationship that they call “superabundance.” But large populations are not enough to sustain superabundance. To innovate, people must be allowed to think, speak, publish, associate, and disagree. In a word, they must be free.

CATO INSTITUTE

AVAILABLE AT ONLINE RETAILERS NATIONWIDE • #CATOBOOKS

HARPER'S
M A G A Z I N E
FOUNDED IN 1850 / VOL. 346, NO. 2075
APRIL 2023
HARPERS.ORG

Letters 2
Live and Let Die *Clancy Martin, Karen Lynn*

Easy Chair 5
Disappear Here *Rachel Kushner*

Harper's Index 9

Readings 11
Lots to Lose *Henry Grabar*
Conspicuous Combustion *Alpha Romeos go hard*
Show Don't Tell *Agnes Callard and Becca Rothfeld*
Revisionist's History *Kafka's trials*
The Feminine Mistake *Zoe Hu*
The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly *Tennessee Williams*
And . . . *Melanie Daniel, Lavar Munroe, and Tim Sandow, and Dwight Garner's modern English usage*

Criticism 24
THE INCREDIBLE DISAPPEARING DOOMSDAY *Kyle Paoletta*
How the climate catastrophists learned to stop worrying and love the calm

From the Archive 33
They Will See It Coming *Betty Friedan*

Letter from Boulder 35
IN SEARCH OF LOST TIME *Tom Vanderbilt*
The science of the perfect second

Memoir 43
NUMINOUS STRANGERS *Lisa Wells*
The enduring allure of pilgrimage

Annotation 54
LONE ON THE RANGE *Leland Nally*
Prairie madness on the Great Plains

Essay 56
THE MELANCHOLY UNIVERSE *László F. Földényi*
Michael H. Parkinson reappears on the No. 56 streetcar

Poetry 62
TO ATTIS *Evan Kennedy*

Story 65
RECOVERY *Jennifer Gilmore*

Reviews 69
NEW BOOKS *Claire Messud*
SIGNS AND WONDERS *Will Stephenson*
Charles Portis and the art of getting out in time

Puzzle 79 *Richard E. Maltby Jr. and Barry Stewart Mann*

Findings 80

Cover: Design by Fausta Kingué

HARPER'S
MAGAZINE

John R. MacArthur, President and Publisher

Editor
Christopher Beha
Managing Editor
Stephanie McFeeters
Senior Editors
Joanna Biggs, Elizabeth Bryant,
Christopher Carroll, Joe Kloc,
Katherine Ryder, Will Stephenson
Art Director
Kathryn Humphries
Editor Emeritus
Lewis H. Lapham
Washington Editor
Andrew Cockburn
Poetry Editor
Ben Lerner
Associate Editors
Alex Kong, Elena Saavedra Buckley
Deputy Art Director
Maria Dubon
Assistant Editors
Susanna Brustin, Megan Evershed,
Charlie Lee, Lake Micah, Maya Perry
Production Manager and Designer
Chloe Arnold
Editorial Interns
Andie Blaine, Isabel Ruehl,
Katherine Smith, Becky Zhang
Contributing Editors
Andrew J. Bacevich, Kevin Baker,
Tom Bissell, Joshua Cohen,
John Crowley, Wes Enzinna,
Tanya Gold, Gary Greenberg,
Jack Hitt, Edward Hoagland, Scott Horton,
Frederick Kaufman, Garret Keizer,
Mark Kingwell, Walter Kirn,
Rafil Kroll-Zaidi, Richard Manning,
Clancy Martin, Duncan Murrell,
Rachel Nolan, Vince Passaro,
James Pogue, Francine Prose,
Ellen Rosenbush, Jeff Sharlet,
Christine Smallwood, Zadie Smith,
Rebecca Solnit, Matthew Stevenson,
Barrett Swanson, John Edgar Wideman
Contributing Artists
Lisa Elmaleh, Balazs Gardi,
Samuel James, Nicole Tung,
Tomas van Houtryve
Contributing Designer
Sheila Wolfe

Vice President and General Manager
Lynn Carlson
Vice President, Circulation
Shawn D. Green
Vice President, Marketing and Communications
Giulia Melucci
Vice President, Advertising
Jocelyn D. Giannini
Vice President, Digital
Violet Lucca
Virginia Navarro, *Assistant to the Publisher*
Kim Lau, *Senior Accountant*
Eve Brant, *Office Manager*
Perri Smith, *Advertising Operations Coordinator*
Advertising Sales:
(212) 420-5773; perri@harpers.org
For subscription queries and orders please call:
800-444-4653

LETTERS

Live and Let Die

Michel Houellebecq suggests that agitating for medical assistance in dying infantilizes those who seek relief when their suffering becomes intolerable [“The European Way to Die,” Revision, February]. In making this argument, he contends that suffering one’s death throes without alleviation—no matter how debilitating or agonizing the condition—has always been considered noble. This is simply untrue. Seneca, who recommends finding “the proper time to slip the cable,” is one of many ancient philosophers who argued that the wise human seeks not a “natural” death but a good one. Valerius Maximus writes of early inhabitants of present-day Marseilles:

> A poison compounded of hemlock is under public guard in that community, which is given to one who has shown reasons to the Six Hundred, as their senate is called, why death is desirable for him. The enquiry is conducted with firmness tempered by benevolence, not suffering the subject to leave life rashly but providing swift means of death to one who rationally desires a way out.

Medically assisted death has been practiced for as long as there have been doctors. It was simply performed clandestinely. When my stepfather died of leukemia, his hospice nurse told us exactly how many pills *not* to take. Treating this kind of assistance as an open secret leads to a lack of transparency and appropriate regulation, while exposing care workers to unnecessary legal risks.

But when appropriate laws and procedures are in place, people may choose to experience death without medication because they know help is available should they need it—a fact Houellebecq acknowledges. Having the option of medical assistance in dying may also stop people from taking matters into their own hands.

The bizarre “go it alone” attitude Houellebecq expresses is part of what keeps death largely excised from public life in Western society. We need to be more open-minded, not more dogmatic, about the inevitable, and sometimes excruciatingly painful, process of death. Doctors are there with us at the beginning, helping us enter life; they should also be there at the end, helping us leave.

Clancy Martin
Kansas City, Mo.

In 2014, my daughter was being treated by a gastroenterologist for irritable bowel syndrome. She spent six months in pain, frequently vomiting and experiencing diarrhea. One day, I took her to the emergency room where a physician ordered an immediate MRI. The doctor then informed us she had Stage IV cancer of the liver and pancreas. She began

Harper’s Magazine *welcomes reader response. Please address mail to Letters,* Harper’s Magazine, 666 *Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10012, or email us at letters@harpers.org. Short letters are more likely to be published, and all letters are subject to editing. Volume precludes individual acknowledgment.*

treatment, during which she suffered paralysis from nerve block. We then arranged hospice care. She was on a steady morphine drip but still in considerable pain. Eventually, she requested a voluntary death. The hospice refused. She lived for four more months and died on Christmas Eve. I regret that I didn't take her to a European country.

Karen Lynn
Plant City, Fla.

A Matter of Forum

During your recent forum on liberalism ["Is Liberalism Worth Saving?," Forum, February], Deirdre McCloskey repeatedly claimed that poor people shouldn't complain about their material circumstances because they are better off in absolute terms than the poor of previous generations. Though the other panelists did rebut her comments, they did so belatedly and with not nearly enough force.

McCloskey's insistence that people should evaluate situations in transhistorical terms rather than protest the inequities of their own time and place proceeds from a wrongheaded conception of freedom that excises us from our contexts. McCloskey wants us to be more like those abstractions of people beloved by free marketeers: perfectly rational, perfectly informed, perfectly free to choose. She wants us to move to the big city when our traditional rural lifestyle is no longer economically competitive. But when you separate people from their contexts, you do not set them free—you erase them. Each of us is fundamentally entwined with the world and with those around us. This interdependence defines our lives and gives them meaning. We are not free; nor should we want to be.

Jonathan Allmaier
Bronx, N.Y.

Besides Patrick Deneen's reliably imbecilic misrepresentation of my work at *National Review*, I especially enjoyed his advice that we must open our hearts and concern ourselves with the prospects of those without Ivy League educations. As someone who didn't graduate from college, I always look to former Princeton professors for such insights.

Kevin D. Williamson
Dallas, Tex.

Going for Gold

Hillary Angelo's article on the rush to build solar farms in the West partially misrepresents the interests of local residents ["Boomtown," Letter from Nevada, January]. They were portrayed as environmentalists opposed to solar energy because it would destroy the desert environment; in fact, half a dozen gold mine contractors have proposed sites in the area, a move supported by current residents. This would be far more toxic to the desert than solar farms. Although I agree with Angelo's conclusion that solar power should be concentrated in cities, the situation in Beatty is far more complex than was reported.

Naomi Rachel
Boulder, Colo.

Hillary Angelo responds:

As Naomi Rachel points out, and as I acknowledge in my piece, many Beatty residents support gold mining. When I asked them why, residents said that gold mining is part of the region's economic and cultural history, and appears to be less of a threat to the tourist economy they hope to build around the town's mining past.

"Boomtown" focuses on solar energy not because it's the most destructive land use, but because it's a new one: an apparently revolutionary technology that embodies hopes for a transformative response to climate change. Critics of renewable energy development, such as those in Beatty, tend to be dismissed as climate deniers or NIMBYs putting property rights before the public good. My article aimed to show that opponents are in fact making a progressive critique of current structures. I didn't want to reproduce false choices between environmental and social justice. Instead, I'd hoped to push the conversation toward bigger questions about trajectories of change.

ST JOHN'S
College

Froissart's Chronicles
Jurgen
Cabell
BLAISE PASCAL
LES PENSÉES
THE THREE MUSKETEERS
THE THREE MUSKETEERS
OLD GORIOT

MA LIBERAL ARTS
MA EASTERN CLASSICS
LIBERAL ARTS
EDUCATION CERTIFICATE

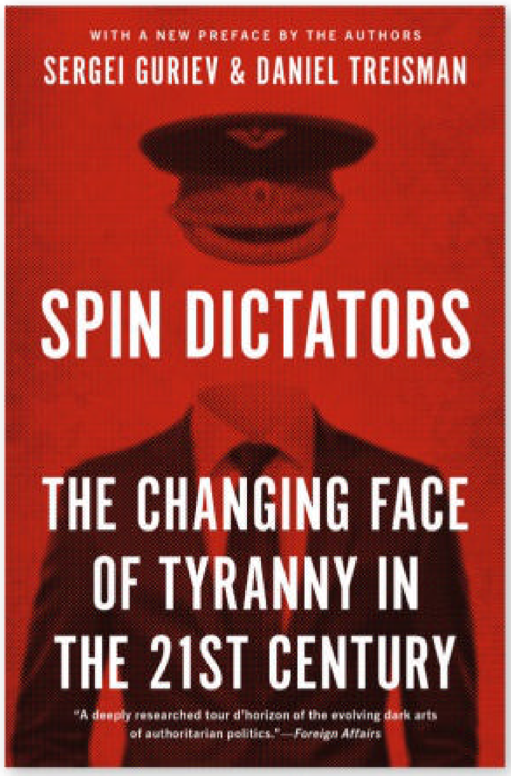
THE PREMIER
GREAT BOOKS
EDUCATION.

On Campus
and
Online

ANNAPOLIS, MD
SANTA FE, NM

www.sjc.edu/graduate

New in Paperback from Princeton

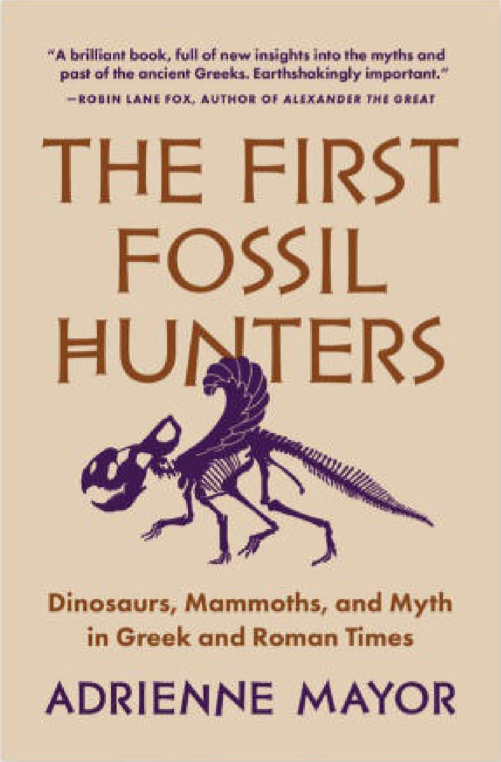

WITH A NEW PREFACE BY THE AUTHORS
SERGEI GURIEV & DANIEL TREISMAN
SPIN DICTATORS
THE CHANGING FACE OF TYRANNY IN THE 21ST CENTURY
"A deeply researched tour d'horizon of the evolving dark arts of authoritarian politics."—Foreign Affairs

"Timely and indispensable."

—*Atlantic*

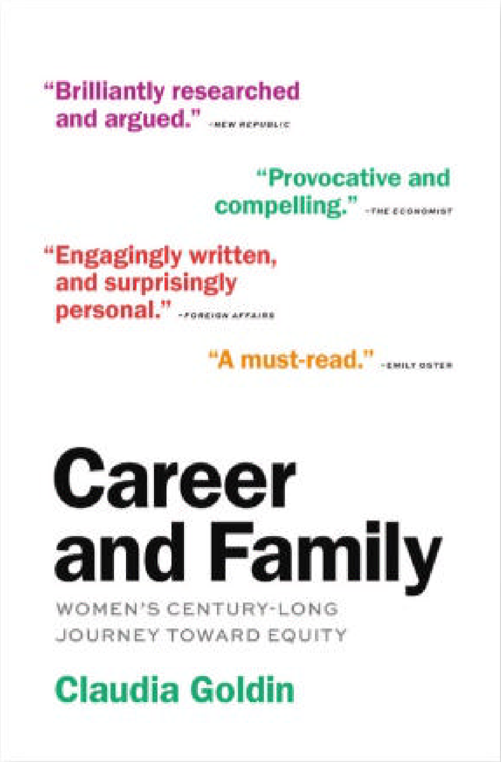
"A fascinating new book."

—*The Economist*


"A brilliant book, full of new insights into the myths and past of the ancient Greeks. Earthshakingly important."
—ROBIN LANE FOX, AUTHOR OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT
THE FIRST FOSSIL HUNTERS
Dinosaurs, Mammoths, and Myth in Greek and Roman Times
ADRIENNE MAYOR

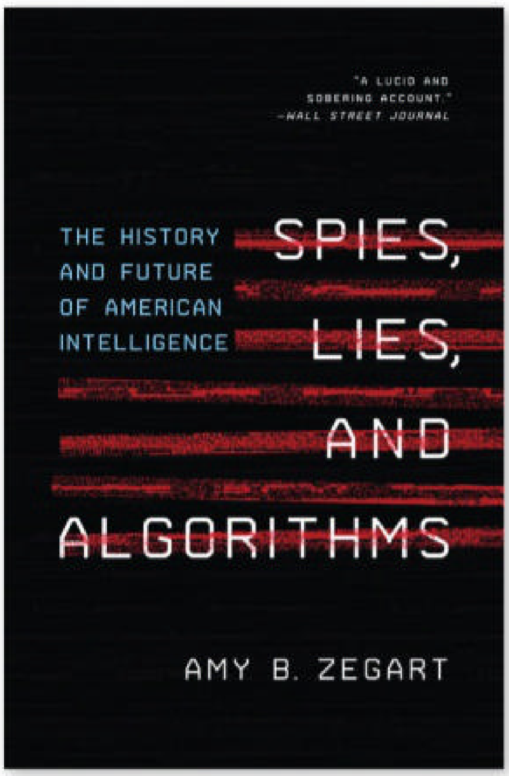
"A historical and scientific detective story of first rank. . . . [Mayor's] results are as striking as they are entertaining."

—Mott T. Greene, *Science*


"Brilliantly researched and argued." —NEW REPUBLIC
"Provocative and compelling." —THE ECONOMIST
"Engagingly written, and surprisingly personal." —FOREIGN AFFAIRS
"A must-read." —EMILY OSTER
Career and Family
WOMEN'S CENTURY-LONG JOURNEY TOWARD EQUITY
Claudia Goldin

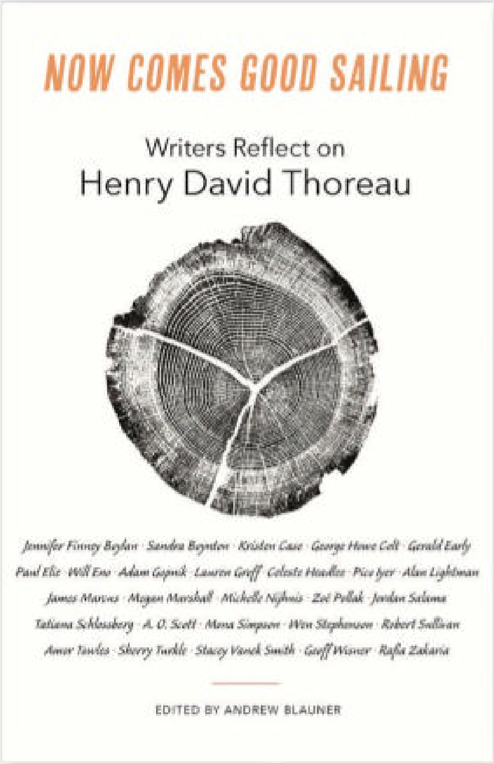
"*Career and Family* is a radical book. It is also brilliantly researched and argued."

—Lily Meyer, *New Republic*


"A LUCID AND SOBERING ACCOUNT." —WALL STREET JOURNAL
THE HISTORY AND FUTURE OF AMERICAN INTELLIGENCE
SPIES, LIES, AND ALGORITHMS
AMY B. ZEGART

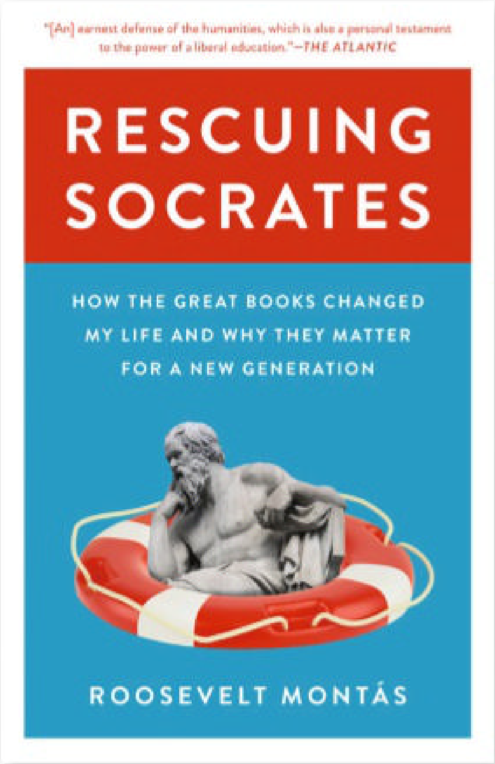
"A perfect primer for anyone trying to understand how the intelligence community is meeting the challenges of the digital age."

—Dina Temple-Raston,
Washington Post


NOW COMES GOOD SAILING
Writers Reflect on Henry David Thoreau
Jennifer Finney Boylan · Sandra Boynton · Kristen Case · George Howe Colt · Gerald Early
Paul Elie · Will Eno · Adam Gopnik · Lauren Groff · Celeste Headlee · Pico Iyer · Alan Lightman
James Marcus · Megan Marshall · Michelle Nijhuis · Zoë Pollak · Jordan Salama
Tatiana Schlossberg · A. O. Scott · Mona Simpson · Wen Stephenson · Robert Sullivan
Amor Towles · Sherry Turkle · Stacey Vanek Smith · Geoff Wisner · Rafia Zakaria
EDITED BY ANDREW BLAUNER

"A remarkable anthology. . . . Blauner's table of contents reads like a 'Who's Who of Intelligent Modern Prose'. . . . This collection amplifies the wisdom of Thoreau for an age that is frequently hard of hearing."

—John Kaag, *New York Times*


"[An] earnest defense of the humanities, which is also a personal testament to the power of a liberal education."—THE ATLANTIC
RESCUING SOCRATES
HOW THE GREAT BOOKS CHANGED MY LIFE AND WHY THEY MATTER FOR A NEW GENERATION
ROOSEVELT MONTÁS

"[An] earnest defense of the humanities, which is also a personal testament to the power of a liberal education."

—Thomas Chatterton Williams,
The Atlantic

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS

EASY CHAIR

Disappear Here

By Rachel Kushner

There was a football game that afternoon at Buckley and though I can remember who I masturbated about on that early October day (I wrote it down—I kept lists, a jack-off journal) I can't remember what team the Griffins were playing though I knew Susan would be in the stands, mildly cheering Thom on as quarterback, and I took a chance and assumed Robert Mallory wouldn't be attending the game.

Robert Mallory is the mysterious newcomer to the Buckley School in Sherman Oaks, where Bret, the autofictional narrator of Bret Easton Ellis's new novel *The Shards,* is a senior. The chance he has taken is to wait for Robert to leave campus in his black Porsche, so that Bret can tail him undetected, as he's driving not his usual car (a Mercedes 450SL) but a Jaguar that belongs to his mother, who is away on a series of European cruises with Bret's father for the duration of the book.

Bret suspects that Robert, a model-handsome cipher, might be . . . a psychopathic killer? Bret is an aspiring writer attuned to a sense of menace on the edges of reality. It's not all in his mind. Someone has "desecrated" a statue of the Buckley mascot. There's a serial killer on the loose, nicknamed "the Trawler," who has committed a string of murders whose details compose themselves into a hazy narrative that Bret follows and his classmates ignore. And a cult has been leaving shambolic traces around town (candles, entrails, pentagrams), its members somehow not having gotten the memo that the hippie thing is finished, done for, kaput.

It's the fall of 1981, the start of a sleek new era. Emotive and long-haired stadium rock is out; synthesizers, hair gel, and neon are in. Earth tones have been replaced by black and white vertical stripes. Doric columns, plinths with nothing on them, and mirrors in weird hard-edged shapes are purchasable from Z Gallerie. A minimally rendered palm tree has become a standard leitmotif—and not just in the temperate zones like Los Angeles, where *The Shards* takes place (and boy does it ever). The Eighties palm tree, as desktop *objet* or wall art, is a mood: sun-bleached and flat.

The U.K. single of Kim Wilde's "Kids in America" has been released, and there's a video of Wilde mouthing the words. She looks exhausted, possibly hungover, and extremely hot. "It was so simple," seventeen-year-old Bret says, "a synthesizer, a smoke machine, Kim Wilde's blank blue-tinged face staring straight at us." He has encountered the video in a nightclub on a deserted stretch of Melrose, a place that is void of décor, just gray carpet and thin lines of neon; sparse groupings of people doing bumps of coke, watching videos, seated on the floor. For Bret, Wilde's demeanor is revelatory. She's

> a girl who could handle anything with her cool indifference: she didn't get excited by the excitement of the song. . . . She was offering an invitation but she didn't care if you came or not, because she could always find somebody else.

Young Bret goes on to connect this aesthetic of numbness—numbness as an ethos and a come-on—to his classmate Susan Reynolds, who has spent years developing and perfecting her own version of blank detachment.

More important than these stark aesthetic shifts, and not disconnected from them: it is finally once again cool to be rich. American wealth might not have been so stratospheric, or so conspicuous, since the Twenties, a decade whose excesses were interrupted by the Depression, the war, then thirty years of state social projects and civil unrest. Now Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher are in power. MTV has debuted. *The Preppy Handbook* has launched (and for those whose look is more edgy, there's Fiorucci). Judith Krantz's *Scruples* is in miniseries.

If the Twenties and the Eighties form a parallel, so do F. Scott Fitzgerald and Bret Easton Ellis. Both detail worlds populated by "careless people," heavy drinking, fast cars. In *The Great Gatsby* and in *Less than Zero,* we find presiding messages of empire at either end of its stretch: the eyes of Dr. Eckleburg staring down from the dissolving night as Nick speeds toward the bright lights of New York, and a billboard over Sunset Boulevard that beckons Clay to "Disappear Here."

In *The Shards,* Bret's admiration for blank Susan is total, but not sexual. Bret is gay, but not out among his friends, and he's secretly in love with Susan's boyfriend, Thom-the-quarterback, whose sex appeal, if sliced into, would have the same wholesome consistency all the way through. Bret is also in love with Ryan Vaughn, a jock in a Trans Am, with whom Bret indulges in a weekend of athletic but tender sex and jacuzziing at Bret's family residence, "the empty house on Mulholland," where a maid, Rosa, leaves prepared foods in the Corona-stocked fridge. A dog has to be let out occasionally, but there is no chaperone and no limit, no interference to the pursuit of pleasure. (Here I might add that the wealth and surfaces of Ellis's world are foreign to me—his Eighties are not my Eighties—but I don't read for relatability. And strangely, unapologetic novelists from the upper echelons, Rachel Cusk and Edward St Aubyn are two other examples, tend to be especially good at writing about class, I mean their own class, because they have nothing to prove, or to obscure, while most writers, I'd wager, descend from some brackish combination of social levels and do not have one consistent class identity from which to draw when building their fictional worlds. They have instead a set of contradictions and anxieties they might try to smooth out rather than explain.)

The Ryan thing doesn't continue because Ryan is determined to walk the line, be straight. Compared to Bret, to Thom and Susan, and to Debbie Schaffer, with whom Bret is faking a romantic relationship, Ryan is merely middle class, less free. Bret's other secret lover is a stoner named Matt Kellner, who disappears early in the book, then turns up dead, probably murdered. Bret seems to be the only one who cares. Matt's mother, who presents as a vivid confection of Joan Didion and Janet Malcolm, chain-smoking in a gazebo, elegant and sedated and tough, treats Bret's angst over the unexplained death of her son as a neurosis he might want to look into. Busy being kids in America, Bret's classmates don't notice Matt's disappearance, and barely register his death; they're more concerned with homecoming, and the disruption posed by Susan's sudden disinterest in being homecoming queen, a refusal that throws everyone off. There are roles, a surface to maintain, and if a single stakeholder bolts, the whole thing might collapse.

Bret, too, is a stakeholder. And so, page by page, he alternates between this high school drama (is Susan cheating on Thom with Robert Mallory?) and a horror story (was Matt tortured before he was killed?). He's caught between addressing his fears and taking another quaalude to calm himself enough to be what his "costume"—his term for the school uniform—promises: a handsome senior and the boyfriend of Debbie, whose attentions have gained him entrée into an elite echelon, even if his status in that realm is like that of an imposter.

Bret himself can't yet pull off the numbness he idealizes in Susan, but he tells the reader that he went on to capture it in his novel *Less than Zero.* The narrator of this book, you see, is the "real" Bret Ellis, the guy who wrote all the other books. This conceit, which Ellis also employed in his novel *Lunar Park,* largely works. It is both a ruse and not a ruse. *The Shards* has an ominous pulse, but when you step back, everything is funny, if not as deeply hilarious as *American Psycho,* a work of spooky prescience and enduring genius that immediately overshadowed the more socially acceptable literature published in its midst. Part of his power, as a stylist, resides in the fact that Bret does not care what anyone thinks of him. If he recently drew upon this well of insouciance to insert himself in culture wars, I am relieved to see him return to fiction, a far more interesting and worthy container for such a power, the power not to care, the power to dedicate a book, as he has here, to "no one."

The length of *The Shards,* at six hundred pages, suggests seriousness, but as Bret said to me, shrugging, "It's a hangout novel." You're meant to get to know these people, check in with what they're up to, maybe draw loose connections to Ellis's other books, other versions of his alter ego. Debbie seems a lot like Blair from *Less than Zero.* And there's a black Porsche in that book as well, from which Julian, a hustler with a drug debt, emerges. The windows of that other Porsche are tinted, obscuring whoever is inside. We're meant to regard the unseen interior as harboring malevolence. And the same might go for the narrator of *The Shards,* who isn't exactly forthcoming about his role in the carnage of the book's plot. He, too, is a black car with tinted windows.

Halfway through *The Shards,* Bret mentions that he paid ninety-nine dollars for a class of '82 Buckley yearbook on classmates.com. It's clear the real Bret did the same. He depicts Buckley, his actual alma mater, with the attention of a true believer. He and the other seniors are building a float for homecoming, inspired by the movie poster for John Carpenter's *Escape from New York* (a film that Bret has seen with Ryan, stroking Ryan's inner thigh during the movie). The concept proves challenging to pull off, and the seniors are still working on it long after the juniors have finished their own float, a simple replica of a Junior Mints box, "its white and pine-green tassels lightly taunting us across the field with its Warholian simplicity." Reading this line, I was certain the green-and-white float is a charged object that hovers not just on the field, but in the psychic structure of the author describing it.

In 2005, the artist Mike Kelley exhibited a sprawling project called *Day Is Done,* consisting of sculptures and videos re-created from yearbook photos of extracurricular activities. In an earlier work, he'd built replicas of every school he'd ever gone to. The rooms whose layouts he could not recall were to be regarded, according to his own project statement, as sites of abuse, evidence of trauma hidden by repressed memory syndrome. If Bret, by comparison, presents a surface without holes, he inserts under that surface an analog to Kelley's trauma: the promise of evil. Mike Kelley and Bret Ellis are different creatures, and yet linked in their use of the yearbook as a kind of primary document, and in their treatment of school as the institutional foundation for the most private dream and for its verso, the nightmare. And they are both utterly committed to the idea that pop culture operates on the mind with the same force as so-called personal experience. "Personal and mass-cultural experiences are treated as equally true; I'm postulating the equivalence of art and memory," Kelley wrote of *Day Is Done*. Ellis is activating an identical precept, if he would not put it so stiffly. *The Shards* is soaked through with this equivalence. If it's loosely built as a thriller, its rigor lies elsewhere, in its cavalcade of songs and wallpaper and restaurants and clubs, of movies and rock posters and historically shaped attitudes.

But there's a scene late in the book, in Debbie's bedroom, which is furnished with a pink chair, a pink phone, horse trophies, a Go-Go's poster, and then again, an X poster from their album *Los Angeles*, and for a single moment in the cavalcade I thought: Hold up. Does Bret just want to have that burning X in our minds, even if Debbie's pink room wouldn't contain such an artifact? The girls in the book are like grown women, blasé and refined and without angst. They are practically Republicans, like their parents. And so the X poster stuck out. But suddenly I remembered, as if that poster had knocked something loose in the stream of my own history, that I had known a girl who was just like this, just like Debbie Schaffer, and my own memory reconfirmed the verisimilitude of this fiction.

I had met this Debbie whose name wasn't Debbie at Berkeley. She was from Los Angeles, and she was like all the girls in this novel, who do their coke discreetly and have the purchasing power of trophy wives and don't get excited by the excitement in the song. She had not gone to Buckley, but another private school—Westlake, I think. She drove a Porsche 911 and was rich and beautiful and had an edge, was able to traverse her pedigree and slum without seeming to. She invited me to L.A., the first time I'd been, and her L.A. was just like the L.A. in *The Shards*. Her parents lived in a house so big they occupied separate wings and communicated only through a housekeeper. The father owned a chic restaurant as a lark, a place to entertain. I ate there with her and her L.A. friends. Later we went from club to club and no one carded us, just as no one gets carded in *The Shards*. She and her friends moved with frictionless ease and this was exotic to me but something was wrong. I see, in my mind's eye, a Frankie Goes to Hollywood T-shirt. The glow of teeth under black lights. I feel this bad vibe being punted from person to person like a ball, a thing that must not touch the floor.

One of the people with us that night was the boyfriend of my friend, whom I also knew from Berkeley. He was a nice guy, but from her same elite world, a place I sensed was not so nice. A few years later, he shot and killed someone with a twelve-gauge shotgun at point-blank range. It was apparently an accident. The person who died was the new boyfriend of my friend, the one who was like the girls in *The Shards*. Her old boyfriend, the one I knew, the one who fired the gun, walked free. A lawyer who had represented O. J. Simpson got him off. Later, there was a story about a sleazy PI named Anthony Pellicano that circled back to this killing, but never mind; what I'm trying to say is, separate from Bret's considerable powers as a fabulist, and separate from the way in which his universe always and curiously bends toward gore, I sense that he is not actually making things up. ■

92NY Center for Culture & Arts

THE VOICE OF LITERATURE

UNTERBERG POETRY CENTER

Mar 30
SARAH KAY
& CLINT SMITH

Apr 10
AMA CODJOE
& CARL PHILLIPS

May 4
QUIARA ALEGRÍA HUDES
& WILLIE PERDOMO

May 11
CATHERINE LACEY
& MIRIAM TOEWS

May 18
the echoing of tenses
American Modern Opera Company, Arthur Sze, Jenny Xie, Monica Youn & others

Jun 20
LORRIE MOORE

GET TICKETS
92NY.ORG
212.415.5500

IN PERSON • ONLINE

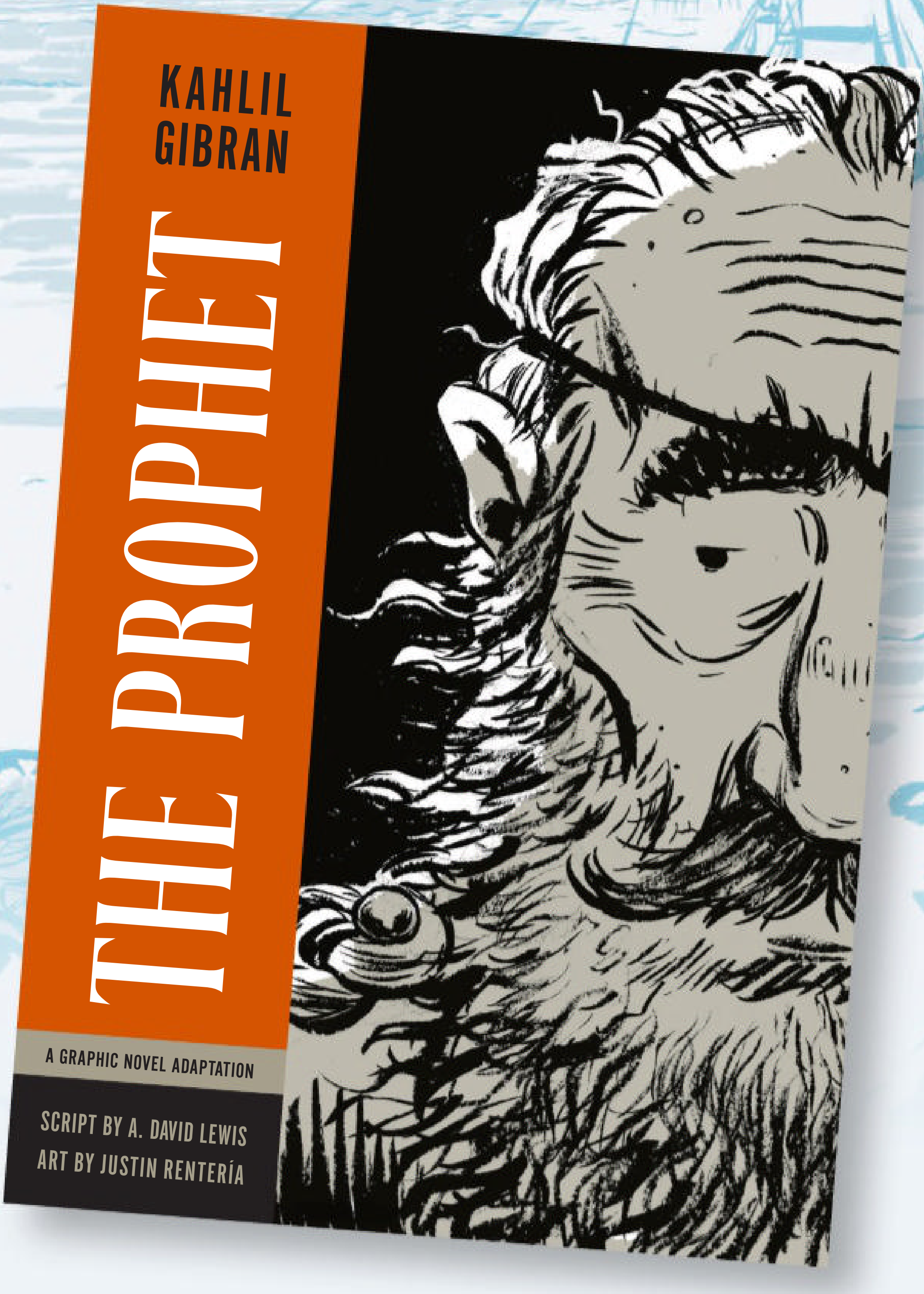
BOX OFFICE TELEPHONE HOURS: 12-4 PM, MON-FRI

THE 92ND STREET Y, NEW YORK

LEXINGTON AVENUE
AT 92ND STREET
NEW YORK CITY

From the worlds of

graphic mundi


KAHLIL GIBRAN
THE PROPHET
A GRAPHIC NOVEL ADAPTATION
SCRIPT BY A. DAVID LEWIS
ART BY JUSTIN RENTERÍA

The sea that calls all things unto her calls me, and I must embark.

"A lively adaptation of *The Prophet*, one sure to draw in new readers and invite those with well-worn copies of Kahlil Gibran's beloved work to rediscover it all over again."

—Nick Sousanis,
author of *Unflattening*

The Prophet
A Graphic Novel Adaptation
Kahlil Gibran
Script by A. David Lewis
Art by Justin Rentería
June | 9781637790502

graphicmundi.org gm

HARPER'S INDEX

Percentage of Americans who do not know the deadline for filing taxes **:** 69

Estimated portion of Americans who owe no federal income taxes **:** 2/5

Percentage of Americans who believe their neighbors cheat on their taxes **:** 48

Who would take a vow of celibacy in exchange for never having to do their taxes again **:** 20

Who would move to a different country **:** 37

Cost of renouncing one's U.S. citizenship **:** $2,350

Percentage by which the government has proposed decreasing this fee **:** 81

Amount, in hours, by which the top-earning 10 percent of U.S. men worked less last year than in 2019 **:** 77

By which the bottom-earning 10 percent of men worked more **:** 37

Portion of American men aged 25 to 54 who are neither working nor seeking work **:** 1/9

Factor by which the number of U.S. job-offer scams reported since 2019 has increased **:** 3

Minimum amount U.S. workers lost last year to these scams **:** $249,962,090

Percentage decrease in the past year in job postings for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion positions **:** 27

Portion of U.S. workers who believe they are treated unfairly **:** 1/2

Portion of U.S. workers who describe their workplace as at least somewhat "toxic" **:** 1/5

Percentage increase since 2019 in the number of whistleblower tips sent to the Securities and Exchange Commission **:** 136

Percentage increase since 2020 in the number of expletives used on corporate earnings calls **:** 60

Portion of U.S. workers who would switch jobs for greater pay transparency **:** 2/3

Portion of workers seeking jobs elsewhere who believe they are being paid below market rates **:** 2/3

Percentage by which U.S. workers with a best friend at work are less likely to look for another job **:** 25

Percentage of U.S. workers who have used ChatGPT for work who have not disclosed this **:** 68

Portion of K–12 educators who have caught students using ChatGPT to cheat **:** 1/4

Portion of Americans who have paid to use online dating platforms **:** 1/3

Who believe that online dating algorithms can predict love **:** 1/5

Percentage by which U.S. women are more likely to think infidelity is wrong for married men than for women **:** 22

By which U.S. men are more likely to think this **:** 14

Portion of parents who feel that their partner judges their parenting ability **:** 1/2

Portion of parents with children under 18 who are worried about their children's mental health **:** 3/4

Who are worried about their children being kidnapped **:** 3/5

Being shot **:** 1/2

Minimum portion of Americans who cannot identify an influential person in their community **:** 7/10

Percentage of influential figures identified who are politicians **:** 63

Who are businesspeople **:** 9

Who are religious leaders **:** 3

Percentage decrease over the past five years in the number of Americans who believe in God **:** 6

Chances that a U.S. adult under 30 believes in astrology **:** 2 in 5

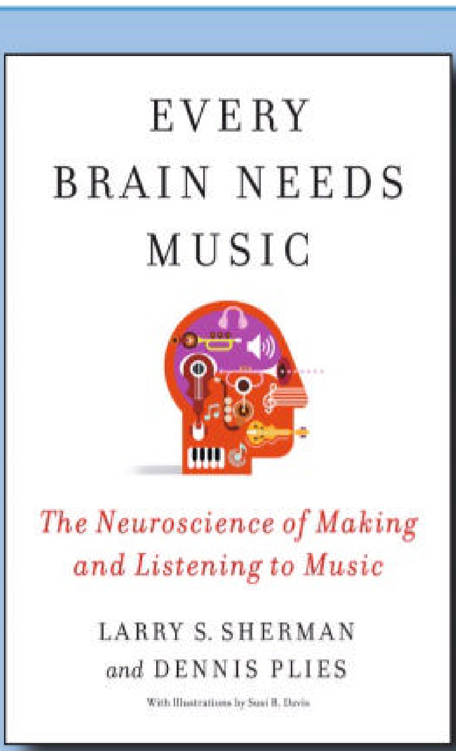
Amount Americans spend each year on the "psychic services" industry **:** $2,200,000,000

Percentage of religious Americans who believe that God can hear prayers and intervene in the world **:** 42

Who believe that God can hear prayers but cannot intervene **:** 28

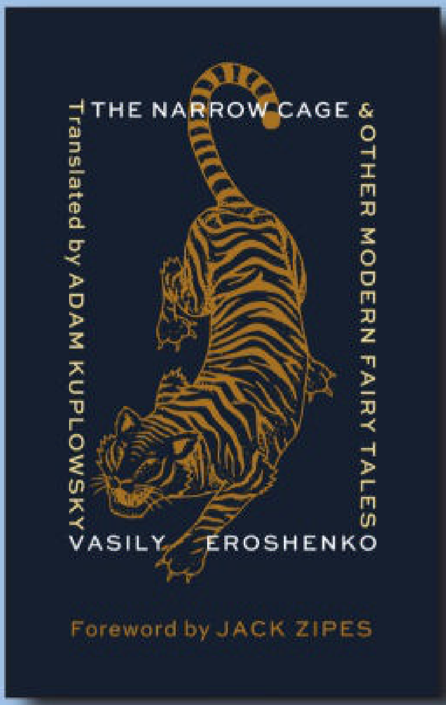
Minimum number of Americans who believe that hell exists but heaven does not **:** 2,608,367

Figures cited are the latest available as of February 2023. Sources are listed on page 78.
"Harper's Index" is a registered trademark.


EVERY BRAIN NEEDS MUSIC
The Neuroscience of Making and Listening to Music
LARRY S. SHERMAN and DENNIS PLIES

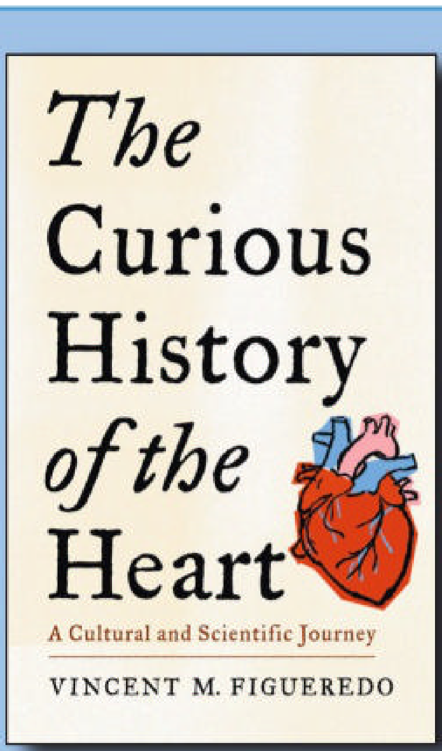
"Engaging and insightful ... each chapter reveals why, for many of us, music is as essential as breathing or eating."

—Valerie Day, lead singer of Nu Shooz and Grammy nominee


THE NARROW CAGE & OTHER MODERN FAIRY TALES
Translated by ADAM KUPLOWSKY
VASILY EROSHENKO
Foreword by JACK ZIPES

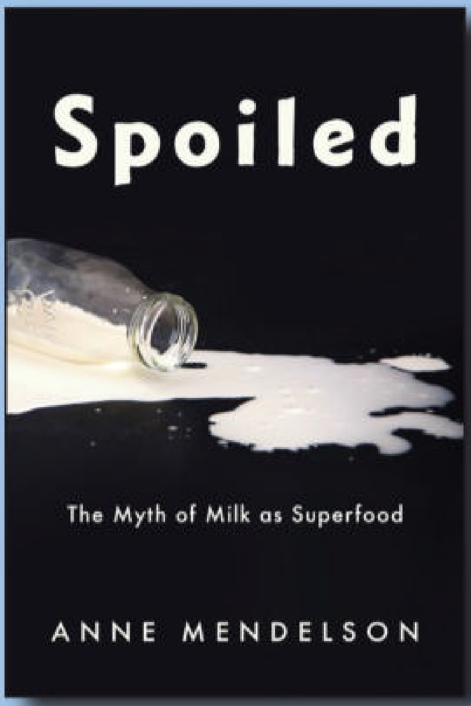
"A treasure trove of inventive and sometimes subversive fables that transcend borders."

—*Tokyo Weekender*


The Curious History of the Heart
A Cultural and Scientific Journey
VINCENT M. FIGUEREDO

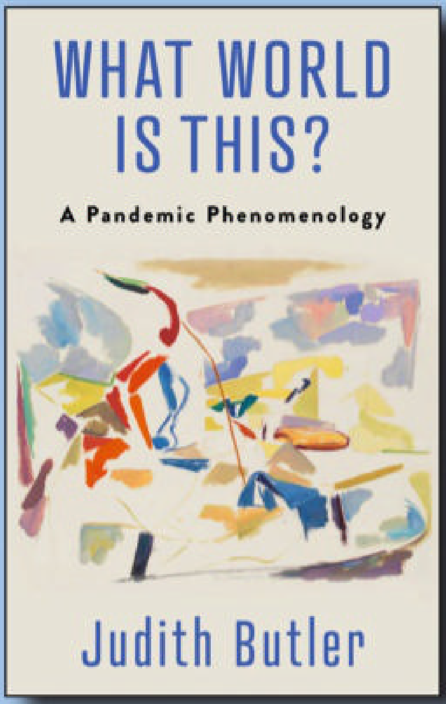
"Vincent Figueredo helps us to understand the heart as a cultural symbol, biological miracle, and central theme in human history. A tour-de-force of scholarship and storytelling, *The Curious History of the Heart* is a great read and an important one."

—Daniel Weiss, president and CEO, Metropolitan Museum of Art


Spoiled
The Myth of Milk as Superfood
ANNE MENDELSON

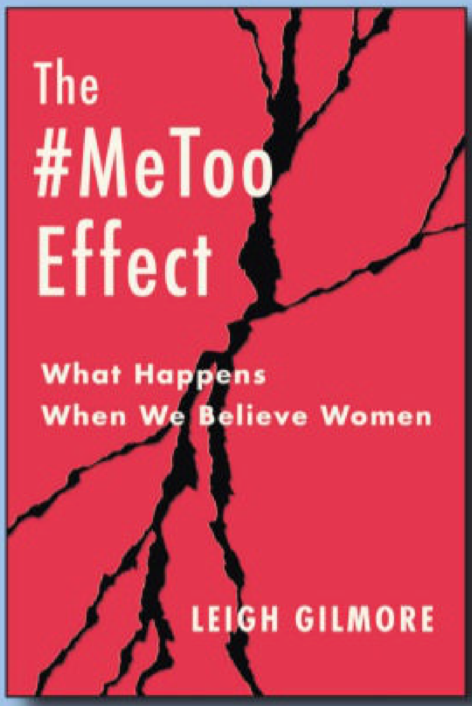
"Scrupulous and unbiased research presented in delightfully readable prose. A masterpiece."

—Barry Estabrook, author of *Tomatoland*


WHAT WORLD IS THIS?
A Pandemic Phenomenology
Judith Butler

"Through a thorough philosophical accounting of the moral imperatives of living in a globalized society, Butler makes a rousing case for pushing progressive policies as a response to the disruptions of the pandemic. Thoughtful and profound, this hits the mark."

—*Publishers Weekly*


The #MeToo Effect
What Happens When We Believe Women
LEIGH GILMORE

"A thoughtful and thorough consideration of a global movement."

—*Publishers Weekly*

COLUMBIA
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

CUP.COLUMBIA.EDU

READINGS

[Essay]

LOTS TO LOSE

By Henry Grabar, from Paved Paradise, *which will be published next month by Penguin Press.*

Parking psychosis is a regular feature of American life. The former NFL safety T. J. Cunningham was killed over a parking dispute at a Denver-area high school. In Las Vegas, Shane Pacada died of a bullet to the chest in a fight over a parking space. In the suburbs of Washington, D.C., a man was charged with attempted murder for shooting a neighbor who had parked in his spot. Twenty-eight-year-old Thomas Rodriguez was killed in Dallas after an argument over a parking spot. All of this took place in February 2019.

These fits of rage are eruptions of a common urge that is also shared by non-homicidal drivers. They are expressions of the same fear that rises into view anytime our parking comes under threat, whether it's in the neighborhood lot or at the curb in front of your house. It's not hard to grasp what makes parking a fixation: without a place to park, you can never get out of the car. A parking space is nothing less than the link between driving and life itself, the nine-by-eighteen-foot portal beyond which lies whatever you got in the car to do in the first place. Every car trip must begin and end with a parking space, and in no uncertain terms. Whoever said life was about the journey and not the destination clearly never had to look for a place to park.

I once missed an entire summer afternoon at the beach because I refused to pay for parking. While I hunted for a spot, my passengers (wisely) took the ferry without me. We expect parking to be immediately available, directly in front of our destination, and most importantly, free. It would be unimaginable to hold any other good or service to the same standard.

But the forces of time, space, and money conspire in such a way that no thriving place can meet more than two of these three needs. Free and convenient but not easily available? That's street parking in any big-city neighborhood. Convenient and available but not free? That's the ferryboat parking lot I left in a huff. Free and available but not convenient? That's where I parked when I missed the boat. It is the expectation and pursuit of all three parking qualities that leads us into parking psychosis.

Many of us have brushed against the threat that undergirds a parking claim. In Hawaii, you might see a spot marked with an upside-down bucket labeled "kapu," a word borrowed from the ancient Hawaiian system of rules governing forbidden acts. Kapu violations are no longer capital offenses, but still worth taking seriously. In Chicago, "dibs" is in effect after a snowstorm, the implements of which might include a chair, a piano bench, a wheelchair, and all manner of nativity figurines. In my head I've always imagined the message is that you or your car might be attacked with the object being used to save the space.

The significance we assign to good parking in our personal lives is surpassed only by our ignorance of its systemic consequences. Parking is integral to the way things work and yet persistently overlooked. It determines the size, shape, and cost of new buildings, the fate of old ones, the patterns of traffic, the viability of mass transit, the life of public space, the character of neighborhoods, the state of the city budget: in short, every aspect of our spread-out environments in which it is virtually impossible to live without an automobile. In our quest to make it as easy as possible to park we've made it awfully hard to do anything else.

The need for a perfect parking space has shaped the country's physical landscape. It has become the organizing principle of American architecture, making our designs bigger, uglier, and farther apart, from the parking-first design of the strip mall, to office towers sitting atop their garage pedestals, to the house itself, in which the garage is often the largest room.

What's more, in many municipalities, there are laws requiring every building to include parking. These prevent us from creating more housing—especially affordable housing—because parking costs so much to construct and takes up so much space. If the Empire State Building had been built to the minimum parking requirements of a contemporary American city, the surface area of its parking lot would cover twelve blocks. In the Seattle area, parking makes up 10 to 20 percent of the cost of construction of multifamily buildings and drives up apartment rents by 15 percent.

Anybody who wants to build a small apartment building in the United States must first confront a multivariate financial geometry problem that begins with how many parking spaces can fit. The size, quantity, and shape of the housing follows from there. Sometimes, with just one parcel, it's hard to make anything work at all. Buy the lot next door and you could unlock some economies of scale—like a driveway with stalls on each side. Buy four and—well, most small-time developers couldn't afford four, even if they could find four adjacent properties. Parking is the immovable object at the heart of neighborhood architecture.

As a result, we have simply stopped building small buildings. Parking requirements have helped to trigger an extinction-level event for bite-size, infill apartment buildings like row houses, brownstones, and triple-deckers; the production of buildings with two to four units fell more than 90 percent between 1971 and 2021.

The apartments that do get built are clustered in megastructures whose designs are dictated by parking placement. One popular model is the "Texas donut," in which a ring of apartments encircles a five- or six-story parking garage (this is the type of building you see in the cool neighborhoods of growing cities). Another is the "parking podium," like Chicago's corncob Marina City, in which the housing sits atop the parking.

Requiring parking spaces is essentially levying a tax, one that drives up the cost of new homes and stops a countless number from being built at all—precisely in the neighborhoods where it is possible to live happily without a car. Parking requirements for new buildings function as a protection racket, forcing new residents to pay for something that old ones get for free on the street and do not want to share. More than half of baby

[Compensation]

CONSPICUOUS COMBUSTION

From the abstract of "Small Penises and Fast Cars," a study conducted by researchers at University College London.

In this experiment, we manipulated what men believed about their own penis sizes relative to those of others. We gave them false information, stating that the average penis size was larger than it is, reasoning that these males would feel that their own penises were smaller than the average. These men were compared to other men who were told that the average penis size was smaller than the true average. We then asked both groups of men to rate how much they would like to own a sports car. These facts and questions were buried among other information so as to mask our hypothesis from participants. We found that males, and males over thirty in particular, rated sports cars as more desirable when they were made to feel that they had a small penis.

COURTESY THE ARTIST AND MINDY SOLOMON GALLERY, MIAMI

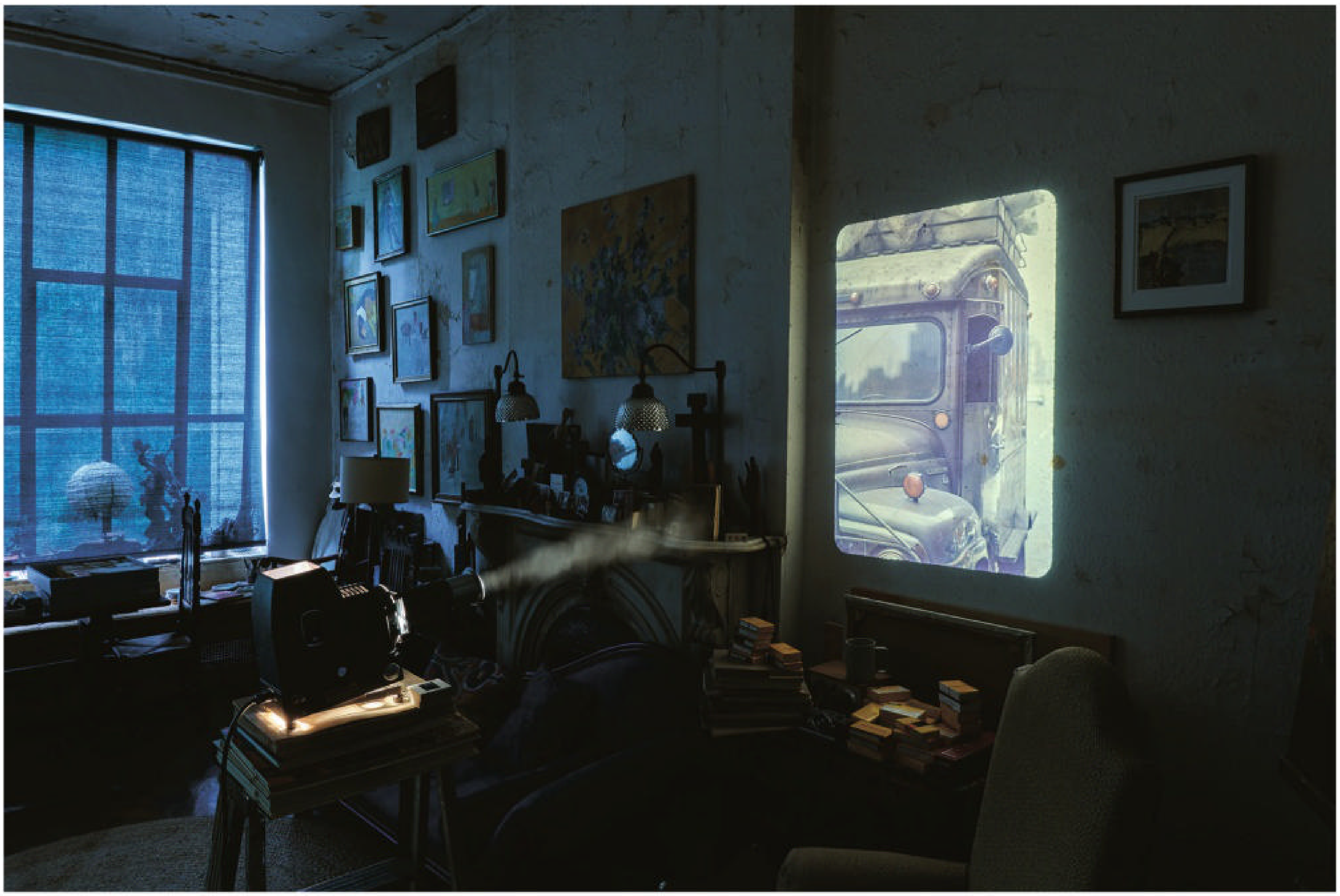
Dune Bunnies, *a painting by Melanie Daniel, whose work was on view last month at Mindy Solomon Gallery, in Miami.*

boomers, a group that tends to dominate local politics, say that free parking is more important than affordable housing in their neighborhoods. This anxiety leads the way to Malthusian thinking about cities: when the impact of new neighbors is measured out in parking spaces, every place starts to look crowded.

While there are still some corners of this country where parking is worth fighting for, in most of the nation the fight was over decades ago. Parking is plentiful. The country builds more three-car garages than one-bedroom apartments. More square footage is dedicated to parking each car than to housing each person. By some estimates, there are as many as six parking spaces for every car. It is this sea of parking, in which destinations bob like distant buoys, that renders mass transit, biking, or walking difficult and dangerous.

The grayness of a city where it's easy to park is embedded in the word *parking* itself, which once referred to the patches of greenery, tiny parks, that sprang up curbside. Now it describes the opposite: the lifeless blacktop. Our cities are full of moonscapes used to store cars. In Los Angeles County, parking now occupies two hundred square miles of land. As a single parking lot it would form a square of asphalt stretching from LAX to Sherman Oaks to Pasadena to Downey. Or, for non-locals, a three-story garage the size of Washington, D.C. And this in a place where people routinely complain about how hard it is to find parking.

A world that wasn't organized around parking would allow us to find our feet. It seems clear that most people would like to be able



© NICHOLAS KRASZNAI AND THE SAUL LEITER FOUNDATION

A photograph of one of Saul Leiter's Kodachromes projected on the wall, by Nicholas Krasznai. Leiter's monograph The Unseen Saul Leiter *was published last year by D.A.P.*

to leave the car behind once in a while. One reason that Americans retain such nostalgia for college is that it was the only time in our lives when so much was within walking distance. We take our vacations to places where we can get out of the car—Charleston, Manhattan, Miami Beach, Rome. Housing prices reflect the desirability of such destinations, making anything but a brief stay off limits to all but a few.

Without parking baked into our streets and architecture, how many more people could live in walkable places like these? How many car-dependent places, freed from parking laws, could grow into neighborhoods where people could ride bikes? Where a family with three cars could get by with two, and a family with two cars might manage with just one? In that world, it would be easier, not harder, to find a spot, and much easier to live in a place where you would not need to drive quite so often. Kids could walk to school and adults to the grocery store. In a world with better parking, there might be fewer places to park, but in place of those old parking spots would emerge a city so much richer and fuller and fairer that we would not think twice about the one we had lost.

[Conversation]

SHOW DON'T TELL

From "Should Writers Talk?," a discussion between the writers Agnes Callard and Becca Rothfeld that was held in January at the University of Chicago.

AGNES CALLARD: One of the reasons you give for why writers shouldn't talk is that you see writing as being more malleable, because conversation does not allow for revision or retraction. I found that surprising.

BECCA ROTHFELD: In writing, you have more time to think about what you actually believe. I think the mistake people make is taking things that people say to be expressive of their beliefs. I only know what I think after I've reflected on it for long periods of time. When an immediate response is demanded of me I just blurt out whatever off the top of my head, as I'm currently doing.

CALLARD: That's what I was thinking—that conversation allows you to figure out what you think.

ROTHFELD: As a means of figuring out what you think, conversation is pretty good, but as a means of expressing your considered opinions, it's not very good, and the problem is that it's often mistaken to be a means of expressing your considered opinions. You'll see people quoting writers' interviews as if they have any idea what the fuck they're saying. And they don't; they're just making it up as they go along. I mean, I speak for myself.

CALLARD: What if what you want to do is sort of hear somebody's thinking? Maybe people are interested in being spectators of the process of thinking.

ROTHFELD: If your interest is just in seeing people flail around figuring out what they believe, then you could watch people talk. But I think a lot of people want to hear writers talk because they think that it's the same skill set as writing. They think, "I like this person's writing so I'll like their talking because the two things are correlated." And I just think that's not true. That's a mistake.

Writers are people who are often—at least in my case—unsatisfied with the imprecision and immediacy of talking, and who feel that they're often called upon to offer their thoughts too quickly. So one thing that drives somebody to become a writer is dissatisfaction with and ineptitude at speaking.

CALLARD: You seem to really like stuff being slow. I like stuff being fast—and that's why I like reading, because when I talk to people they only say a few ideas at a time, and I'm like, "Come on, say more ideas!" Whereas when I read, I get a lot of ideas in a short time.

ROTHFELD: I'm also quite a fast person. I speak really quickly and I get really impatient when people speak really slowly, which is actually one of the things that I don't like about talking to people. So maybe it's a way of militating against my own crappy tendency to rush through things and to think things too quickly. It's only by forcing myself to slow down, against my natural tendency, that I can figure out what I actually think.

CALLARD: There's a weird way in which you might think it just doesn't matter what you actually believe. Why does that matter?

ROTHFELD: Because—I don't know if I think this, but I'm trying it on—a critic is sort of like a character, and as a critic you're constructing a heteronym for yourself in the way that Pessoa or Kierkegaard did. You're trying to have a critical sensibility that you are very deliberately aestheticizing, stylizing, and constructing. And that requires you to have some level of consistency, and not just to be a bundle of ad hoc offshoots. And that's how one often is in conversation.

CALLARD: Kafka's diaries were just published in a new translation. Another question I had was: Should writers write diaries?

ROTHFELD: Kafka's diaries are full of infelicities. His finished writing is so cool and icy and impenetrable that it's exciting to see him in the process of writing. For someone like me, who writes because they're impatient with the imprecisions of speaking, a diary is not going to achieve the ends that I want, because I want my thoughts to reach my audience in a perfected form. But part of the appeal of Kafka's diaries is the sadistic desire to see somebody who appears in such a polished form disintegrating for once.

CALLARD: When I was an undergrad here, Kurt Vonnegut came and gave a talk. And I had been a big fan of his, so of course I went, and he gave this talk about, like, graphing

[Imagery]

COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

From similes used by the critic Dwight Garner in book reviews for the New York Times *since 2017.*

Like frogs run over by a lawn mower
Like a goose dementedly stuffing its own liver
Like an octopus playing the bagpipes
Like an eagle outed as a mere tern
Like an armchair inside a snake
Like listening to someone trying to play "Long Tall Sally" on solo cello
Like reading the liner notes to a Frank Sinatra album at midnight through a glass of bourbon
Like being stranded in a bar where the jukebox has only two songs, both by Pat Benatar
Like watching Merle Haggard perform in an uptight club with a quiet policy and a two-drink minimum
Like a squash opponent who pockets your serve, walks off the court, and returns four months later to fire it back
Like a jittery teenager with bedhead, cystic acne, and moatlike halitosis who needs $50 and the car keys
Like a tour of a once-majestic eighteenth-century house now burned to its foundations that rejoices in what's left amid the ashes
Like prolonged hallucinations

and mapping novels. It struck me as incredibly dumb. And I was extremely disillusioned. I was like, "Well, I thought Kurt Vonnegut was a genius, but turns out he has really dumb views about novels. Not gonna read his novels anymore."

So this is like your fear of being exposed. But now I'm wondering, maybe I had just elevated Vonnegut too much to start with. Writers create this illusion of genius, and then it's exposed when they talk. But you might think, instead of the corrective being writers not talking, maybe the corrective should be: we realize that writers don't actually understand that much.

[Drafts]

REVISIONIST'S HISTORY

By Franz Kafka, from an undated entry in The Diaries of Franz Kafka, *which was published by Schocken Books in January. Translated from the German by Ross Benjamin.*

1.

When I think about it, I must say that my education has in some respects done me great harm. I certainly wasn't educated in some remote place, say, in a ruin in the mountains, against which I couldn't utter so much as a word of reproach. At the risk of being misunderstood by every last one of my former teachers, I would gladly and preferably have been that little ruin dweller, burnt by the sun, which there in the midst of the rubble would have shone for me from all sides on the lukewarm ivy, even if at first I would have been weak under the pressure of my good qualities, which would have shot up in me with the power of weeds.

2.

When I think about it, I must say that my education has in some respects done me great harm. This reproach applies to many people, namely my parents, some relatives, several visitors to our house, various writers, one cook in particular who took me to school for a year, a crowd of teachers (whom I have to press close together in my memory, or else one will escape me here and there, but since I've packed them so tightly together the whole again crumbles away in places), a school inspector, slowly walking passersby; in short this reproach winds its way like a dagger through society. I will hear no contradiction to this reproach, since I've already heard too many and since in most of the contradictions I've also been refuted, I include these contradictions in my reproach and now declare my education and this refutation have in a number of respects done me great harm.

3.

Often I reflect on it and then I always must say that my education has in some ways done me great harm. This reproach is directed against many people, indeed they stand here together, as in old group pictures, they don't know what to do with one another, at the moment it doesn't occur to them to lower their eyes and in their anticipation they don't dare to smile. My parents are there, some relatives, some teachers, one cook in particular, some girls from dancing lessons, some visitors to our house from earlier days, some writers, a swimming master, an usher, a school inspector, then some people whom I met only once on the street and others whom I can't remember at the moment and those whom I will never again remember and finally those whose instruction I being somehow distracted at the time didn't notice at all, in short there are so many that one must take care not to mention anyone twice. And I voice my reproach to all of them, introduce them to one another in this way, but tolerate no contradiction. For I have truly endured enough contradictions already and since in most of them I have been refuted, I have no choice but to include these refutations too in my reproach and to say that besides my education these refutations too have in some ways done me great harm.

Does one expect perhaps that I was educated in some remote place? No, in the middle of the city, I was educated in the middle of the city. Not, for example, in a ruin in the mountains or by a lake. My parents and their followers were until now covered with my reproach and gray; now they easily brush it aside and smile, because I have withdrawn my hands from them and brought them to my forehead and am thinking I should have been the little ruin dweller, harkening to the cries of the jackdaws, flown over by their shadows, cooling off under the moon, burnt by the sun, which, streaming through the rubble, would have shone for me from all sides on my bed of ivy, even if at first I would have been a little weak under the pressure of my good qualities which would have had to grow in me with the power of weeds.

4.

I often reflect on it and let my thoughts take their course without interfering, but I always come to the same conclusion that my education has spoiled me more than everyone I know and more than I comprehend. Yet I can speak about this only once in a while, for if someone asks me: "Really? Is that possible? Is one supposed to believe that," then out of nervous fear I immediately try to qualify it.

Externally I look like everyone else; have legs torso and head, pants, coat and hat; I was made to do plenty of gymnastics and if I have nonetheless remained rather short and weak it was simply not to be avoided. Besides, I am appealing to many people, even young girls, and those to whom I am not appealing still find me tolerable.

[Throwback]

THE FEMININE MISTAKE

By Zoe Hu, from "The Agoraphobic Fantasy of Tradlife," which was published in the Winter 2023 issue of Dissent.

Love is the ultimate value, and love is under threat: That is the rumor that we good, secular citizens are hearing, at a time when capitalism's drag on human affections—through modern promiscuity, social alienation, and the ever-growing number of hours we spend at work—has become harder than ever to ignore. If only there was a way to save love! Well, respond the reactionaries: the way lies in tradition—more specifically in "tradlife," the handy neologism for a recent set of attitudes and lifestyles devoted to glorifying the nuclear family and its jolly trappings.

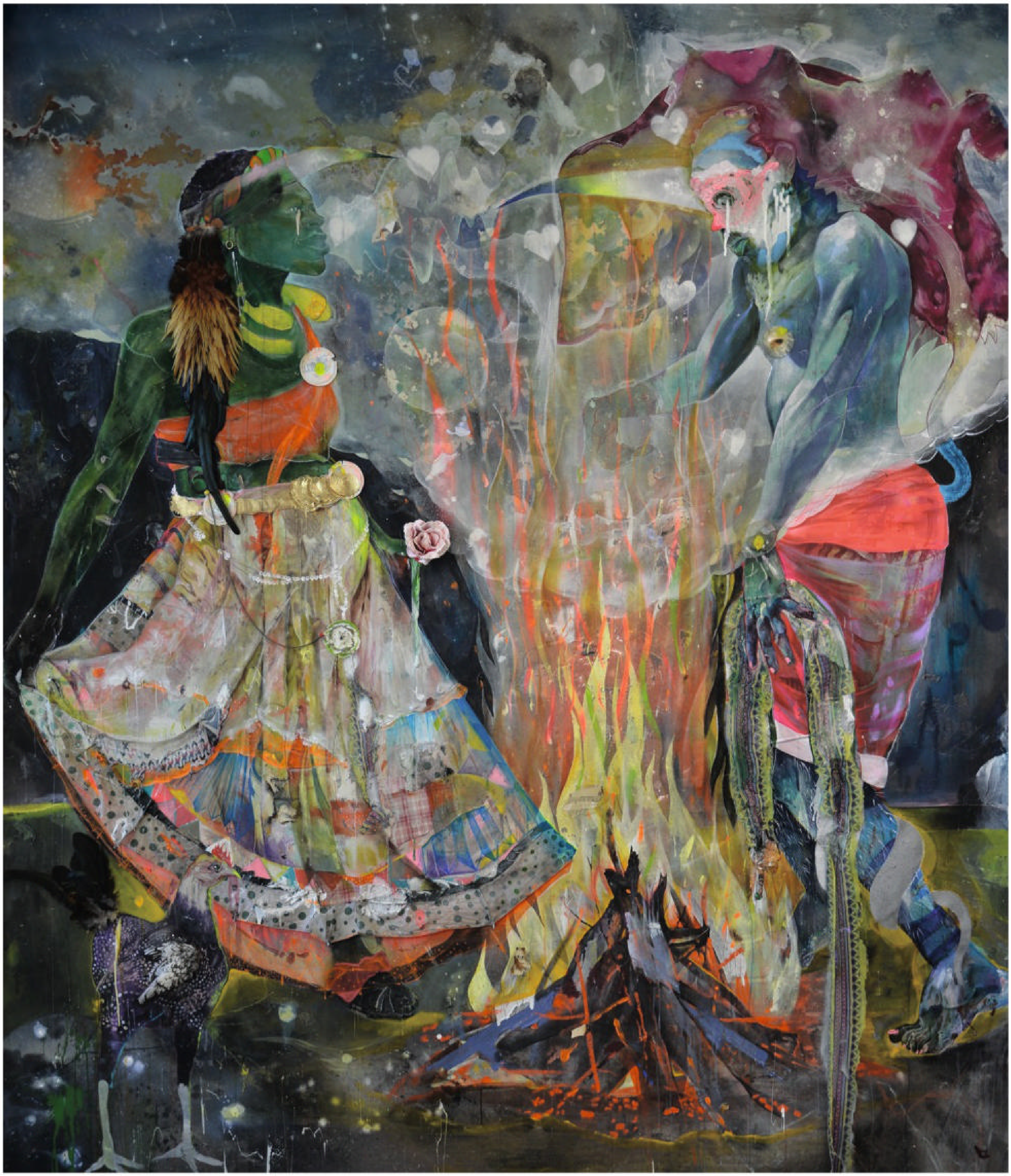
Like all lore, tradlife has a central hero: the tradwife, a woman who deliberately abandons the workforce and retreats indoors to care for her husband, posting photos and videos designed to convey her safety and leisure. What unites tradwives in all their cultural iterations—from the Mormons who forswear premarital sex to the supposedly leftist women living in big cities and earning advanced degrees—is their rejection of feminism, represented by the gloomy figure of the working woman.

This is the twist that makes tradlife a phenomenon of our times: it includes earnest critique of life under capitalism. Many tradlifers are young women who hate work and celebrate arrangements which rescue them from the early-morning commute. "When my friend's mom first started dating her husband," one viral tweet reads, "he said 'Stay with me, marry me, and you'll never have to work again.'" Like a trapdoor, the idea swings open to reveal a fantasy too fragile and nostalgic to be taken in the open air. In their videos tradwives drift slowly through minimalist rooms and sedately narrate their days: "I fill up Luke and I's water bottles to make sure we're hydrated," e.g. Their schedules seem always to be viciously regimented. Unpredictability and genuine surprise are rare, as are appearances by other people. At its extreme, the lifestyle is agoraphobic.

One starts to wonder whether the trend suggests an underlying anxiety: whether these women, in professing to love men, actually fear them. The tradwife has no male coworkers; if she sees men socially, they are the harmless husbands of friends or her own family members. For the most part, she encounters just one male figure, her husband, and only during the few hours before and after he goes to work. Ironically, the tradwife has proven herself similar to the lesbian separatists of the feminist second wave she claims to detest. In disavowing feminism she actualizes one of its most infantile desires: reducing contact with men and the sexual threat (or promise) they pose to a blessed minimum.

It therefore seems likely that tradlife's purchase was also strengthened by the #MeToo movement, which, while recognizing the real destruction that misogynistic violence has wrought, also encouraged women to see life beyond the home as an unmanaged territory where other people lurk maliciously. The movement's revelations were shocking not necessarily in their particulars but in their resonance and iterability. Overnight, every man became suspect. The rot was structural. In an era of heteropessimism, a woman may now feel that to compete with men professionally or to date them casually is an ill-fated venture, affording few opportunities for progress or respect. Why not stay home?

Tradlife purports to offer a risk-averse solution to these challenges: it guards women from most men and from public life. But if, by describing the misery of work, tradlife ennobles itself, its ethos also maintains a willful stupidity about capitalism's historic dependence on the family. Tradwives forsake life in society for the lonely, constrictive refuge of bourgeois home ownership, and in doing so acquiesce to our collective neglect of the public sphere. In response to



COURTESY THE ARTIST AND MONIQUE MELOCHE GALLERY, CHICAGO

You People With Hearts, *a mixed-media artwork (chicken feathers, fabric, jewelry, sheet music, and spray paint) by Lavar Munroe, whose work was on view last month at Monique Meloche Gallery, in Chicago.*

discontent, tradlife withdraws from the world it wishes were different and looks backward to formulaic relationships we have long known to be impoverished. The phenomenon conceals from its purveyors the prospect of a different kind of society altogether.

In contrast, feminism at its best has maintained that we do not know the full range of love's possibilities; that without the pain and insecurity of a world where dignity is never fully shared, or without the imperative of property, love could one day be different. Feminism can countenance what is anathema to most political philosophies: humility regarding change's slow progress. Love is universal, maybe, but it is not immutable.

[Fiction]

THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY

By Tennessee Williams, from "Till One or the Other Gits Back," which is collected in The Caterpillar Dogs and Other Early Stories, *out this month from New Directions.*

She stood now at the door of the house looking out, her lean, saturnine face outlined against the blue dusk. It was nearly winter, and dry leaves swept in the door around her and rattled across the bare pine floor. She slammed the door shut and pushed her hands down her sides, and looked into nothing for a moment or two. Then she opened her thin lips and called, "Git ready, Bill! Long 'bout this time he mought be startin' back!"

"Bring down your gun," she yelled more sharply. "I'll fetch them lanterns frum the barn."

The man came lumbering heavily down the stairs. He wore high boots. His big form moved woodenly and the butt of his double-barreled gun trailed along the steps with a clanking that made the woman stiffen.

"Cain't you tote thet gun?" she hissed.

The man's eyes looked uncommonly large and pale in his narrow brown face and his yellow hair hung over his forehead. With a startled movement he hoisted the gun to his shoulder and then stood waiting as though unable to stir without her command.

"Don't stand there like a stick!" she yelled. "Git moving!"

She stood bristling a moment, then darted toward the rear of the house. The man glanced around him like a frightened animal, as though he were seeking some less perilous means of egress than the dark doorway that the woman had taken. But there was apparently no other way out.

Shortly afterward, the man and the woman climbed onto the high front seat of an old Ford parked behind the house. The woman carried two lanterns and a can of coal oil. The man carried his gun.

They drove a piece down the Missouri state highway and then they stopped. Before them was that sharp turn in the road that was known locally as Dead Man's Curve.

The woman scrambled immediately out of the car and stood at the side of the road.

"Git the car outer sight!" she commanded. "We ain't got nary a moment ter lose!"

"Aw, hell!" the man growled weakly. "He'll be too all-fired drunk t'see Kingdom Come!"

"Maybe you kin take chances!" the woman muttered. She retreated among the brush that grew along the field's edge and groped around till she found an old stump directly above the low embankment. She seated herself upon it, but found it too rough. She got up and spread over it her man's leather jacket, which was much too large for her own slender shoulders. She seated herself again, removed some cartridges from the pocket of her raveled brown sweater and started loading the gun with thoughtless precision.

In a few minutes the man joined her there. He seemed uncertain of what to do with his big wooden body.

"Set down!" she commanded.

[Qualifications]

HYPERBOLE PULPIT

From assertions made by current members of Congress.

Claimed to not drink alcohol, before being arrested for drunk driving

Claimed to be a consultant for Dow Jones & Company because he was paid $800 to write an editorial for the *Wall Street Journal,* whose parent company is Dow Jones

Claimed that his parents came to the United States after Fidel Castro took over the Cuban government in 1959, despite records showing their arrival in 1956

Claimed to have served in an elite U.S. Army security unit that protected Richard Nixon at the 1971 World Series, an event that the president did not attend

Claimed to have fought in Vietnam because of his domestic service in the U.S. Marine Corps reserves, which refurbished campgrounds and helped run a Toys for Tots drive

Claimed to have been a U.S. Army Ranger, because he attended a two-month training program that provided graduates with a patch that read RANGER

She nodded her head and turned sharply away from him. She stared down the embankment toward the highway and Dead Man's Curve.

"He mought be 'long most any time naow."

The man shifted uneasily on his haunches. "We should've brung two guns."

"Two guns!" the woman sniffed. "What fer? I'll drap him awright!"

They glanced at each other for a second, the woman's lips slightly sneering, the man's trying nervously to smile. He looked away first, and started to draw a pint bottle from the hip of his corduroy breeches.

"Naw you doan'!" the woman snarled quickly.

She snatched the bottle from his hands and flung it into the highway.

"Aw, Mary," the man complained. It was like the whine of a punished dog.

The man and the woman settled down for their wait. About an hour later the snow started falling in big soft flakes. The woman never changed her position on the stump, but the man moved closer and leaned his shoulder tentatively against her knee. Instantly the woman's tense figure relaxed. She bent over to kiss him. The man made a gurgling sound in his throat and reached up with long, snake-like fingers. The woman pushed him away.

"I seen you was skeered," she mocked, "when you come a-trailin' thet gun down the sta'r! When a man doan' heft his gun to his shoulder. . . ."

"This 'eres my firs' time fer killin' a man," he answered slowly, "an him . . . my twin brother!"

The woman laughed.

"You ought've thought o' thet firs' time you laid hold of me down in the field. A woman cain't live in one house with two men. Leastwise, it ain't safe!"

"Sometimes," said the man, "I think that you hates Clyde 'cause he loves you a little less'n you loves him."

The woman laughed.

"Doan you try figgerin' me out naow, Billy! Only Gawd kin do that!"

"Gawd or the devil!" he said, embracing her legs with his arm until they hurt. The woman suddenly clasped his shoulders with both hands and bent down to his ear.

"Good sight frum here?" he asked, setting himself down awkwardly at her feet.

"I'd ruther it was you," she whispered, "that kept me warm in bed t'night!"

They waited another hour.

"Must've found 'im a woman up thar," she said bitterly, "but he'll be back before sun up."

The man's fingers raised up again, like the heads of snakes from a charmer's basket when the music is played. They groped blindly up toward the woman's body.

"Yore fingers're cold!" she muttered without moving.

The man caught hold of her thighs.

"What made you cry when you seen him in town with Jess Turner that time?"

The woman stiffened.

"How come you cry all the way home?" he persisted.

"You tawk too much 'bout things that doan' consarn you!" hissed the woman. "Effen you doan' shet up 'bout Jess I'll brain you, Billy!"

The snow fell heavier and whirled in a keen wind. The woman lifted her reefer from the stump and wrapped it tight around her breasts, but still her teeth chattered.

"That's right, Jess!" she muttered. "Keep him long as you kin this time! Hit'll be another cold night 'fore you see him agin!"

"Git up!" the man suddenly commanded. The woman's shivering and the broken tone of her voice seemed to have given him a new kind of strength. He grasped the woman's elbows and jerked her up from the stump and sucked fiercely at her lips.

[Sentencing Guidelines]

INSIDER TRADING

From a bill proposed in the Massachusetts legislature in January.

The Commissioner of the Department of Correction shall establish a bone marrow and organ donation program and a bone marrow and organ donation committee. The program shall allow eligible incarcerated individuals to gain not less than a sixty-day and not more than a three-hundred-and-sixty-five-day reduction in the length of their sentence on the condition that the incarcerated individual has donated bone marrow or organ(s). The bone marrow and organ donation committee shall be responsible for establishing standards of eligibility for incarcerated individuals to participate and the amount of bone marrow and organ(s) donated to commute one's sentence. Annual reports including actual amounts of bone marrow and organ(s) donated, and the estimated life-saving associated with said donations, are to be filed with the executive and legislative branches of the Commonwealth.

© THE ARTIST. COURTESY OF UPPLANDS MUSEUM, UPPSALA, SWEDEN, AND LANDSKRONA FOTO, SWEDEN

"Major Alström's wife with the owl" and an untitled photograph, by John Alinder, whose monograph John Alinder: Portraits 1910–32 *was published last year by Dewi Lewis Publishing.*

"Naow git on back to the house! I'll finish this job!"

The woman glared at him a long time through the blurring snow.

Then she reached her hands up to his shoulders and pulled him down for another kiss.

"Git on back an' keep the bed warm till I come!" the man said.

"Thar's more'n one shot in that gun," she said meaningly, "but thar's room fer on'y one man in my house frum naow on."

The woman started slowly down the embankment, clinging from tree to tree, with the black reefer whipping behind her.

At the bottom she spoke aloud once more, and without turning, as though she spoke to herself. "Hit'll be purty cold in that bed … till one or the other gits back!"

The man swore under his breath.

For two hours, lying in bed, she strained her ears for the sound of a gun down the road. But the wind blew so fiercely now that she couldn't have heard. Once she crawled out of bed and opened the window she could see the two lanterns flickering faintly in the middle of the road at Dead Man's Curve. Apparently nothing had happened, time seeming to have struck a snag that night. She slammed the window down hard and got back into bed. With every moment the cold seemed to grow more intense and her body shuddered uncontrollably between the coarse sheets.

A short while later, she heard the door thrown open below. Without pause, the man's heavy footsteps went down the hall and started up the stairs. The footsteps were neither hurried nor slow. There was nothing about them, no individual accent, to distinguish the steps of one from the other. She would have to wait for the returning man's voice to tell her which of the two had come back.

She lay with her eyes tight shut in the lightless room. She was mumbling a sort of formless prayer, and her fingers were clawing the sheets.

Without pause the steps came straight to the bedroom door. The door was pushed open. Then she knew. She knew by the sound of his breath and by the faint odor of alcohol blown into the room's cold air which of the two brothers had come back. She bit her lips hard and waited. Her body seemed to shake the whole bed, and it was difficult to keep her breath from rasping in the aching cold void of her chest.

The steps moved deliberately over to the little table. A match was struck and a second later the lamp flared up.

Opening her eyes slowly, as if from sound sleep, she looked into her husband's alert face.

"Howdy, Clyde," she said sleepily. "Yore late."

The man unbuckled his reefer and dropped it to the floor.

"Been waitin' up long?" he said casually. But she saw him stand still for the answer with his head slightly cocked.

She waited a minute for her voice to settle down in her throat, and then she answered. "Naw. I jes' this minute woke up."

The man jerked into motion again, stripping off his flannel shirt and dropping it beside the reefer.

He leaned toward the woman.

"Didja hear anything a piece down the road?"

"When?"

"Few minutes ago."

She put an irritable note to her voice. "I toleja, Clyde, I jes' naow woke up!"

He turned slowly away from her, scratching his chest.

"Some feller tuck a shot at me down by Dead Man's Curve. A double-barr'l gun! Went crack through the windshield an' missed my head, I reckon, by half'n inch!"

Again the woman met his eyes without perceptibly flinching. The man's eyes dropped first.

"Gawd-a-mighty!" the woman exclaimed at last, as though the full import of this news had just sunk in.

The man grunted, turned over the slop pail, and sat down to remove his boots.

"Two lanterns war a-settin' out thar in the middle o' th' road. T'stop me, I reckon. But I druv right through."

He grunted again, contemptuously. "Them that hunt squirrels best not cock their guns fer a man!"

He tore the rest of his clothes off swiftly and came over to the bed.

He sat down on the edge of it for a moment to rub his cold feet.

Before she could seal her lips against it, the question thrust itself out.

"On'y one shot?" she asked.

"Naw . . ." he answered slowly. "Funny thing. Come to think of it, seem lak I counted . . . two! I heerd the second . . . guess when?"

The woman was silent.

"Atter I turned the car inter th' drive!"

He lowered his body toward her and buried his hands in the quilt, one on either side of her roundly outlined form.

"Ain't seen Billy," said the man. "Whar's Billy?"

The woman's eyes blinked ever so slightly.

"He mus' be sleepin' by naow," she muttered. "He mus' be sound asleep!"

They stared at each other for a long time and slowly they both began to smile. A faint flush crept into the woman's face. Her limbs twitched under the coarse sheets and the gaudy patchwork quilt.

"Hit's been cold in this bed," she purred softly, "waitin' fer you to git home!"

[Poem]

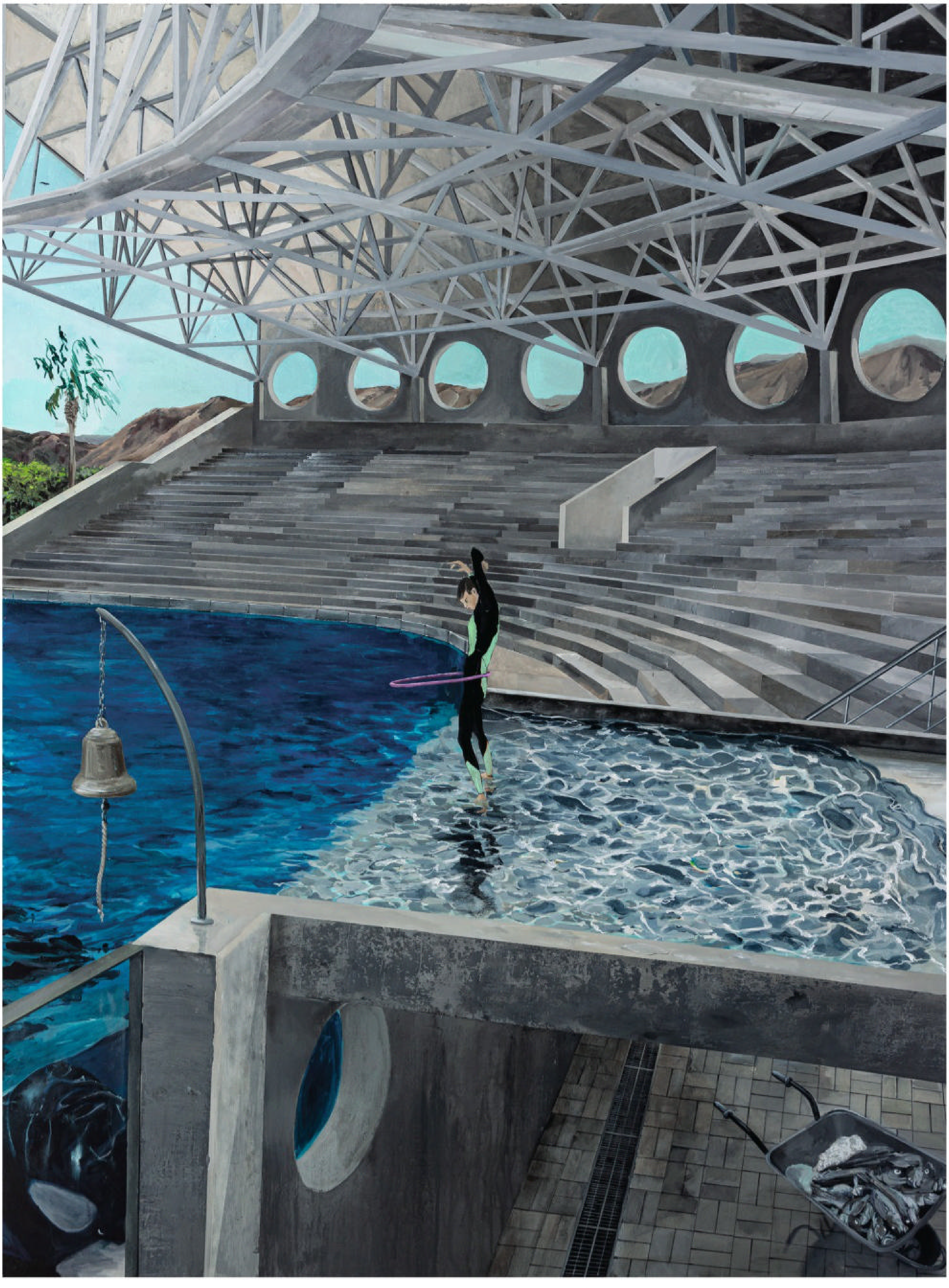
DOUBT & LOVE

By Brenda Hillman, from In a Few Minutes Before Later, *which was published in October by Wesleyan University Press.*

The owl calls all night.
Poetry is another example. Were you
disappointed? No one
tried to fool you. Did you write one line
somebody cherished? It wasn't
between love or work (that was a guy thing).
You make art through the exceptions.

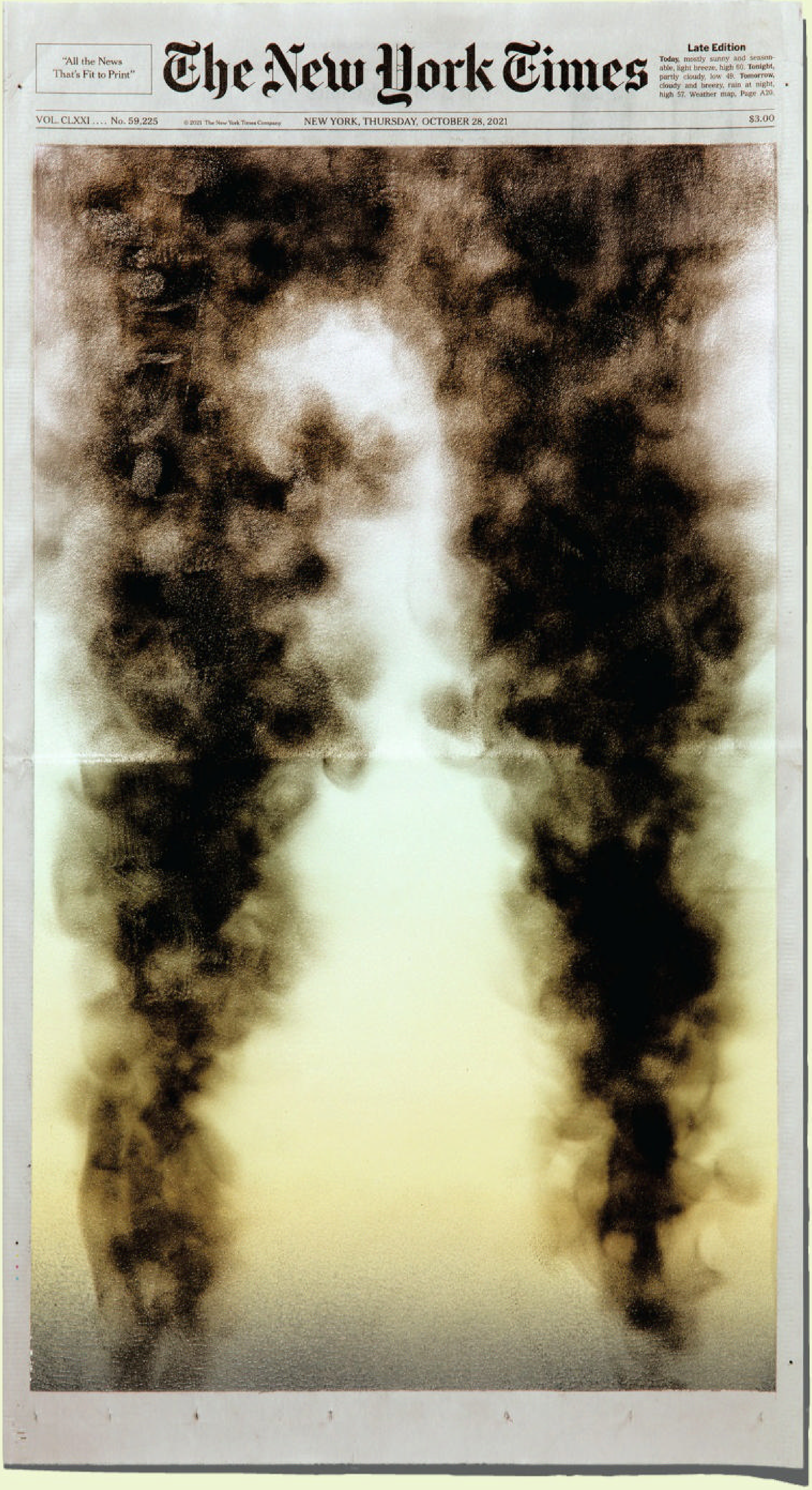
The destroying wind starts up, the new purifier
H recommended traps particles so you can breathe.
A prophet has prepared the double share, some stuff
can be saved, surely matter
matters & it does, they do. Each night brings fear,

communities pick through rubble,
in the lost world: no
justice for human systems as we wear the robe
of sparks & contracts for the species
are called in, of course we could
be doing more. Daylight summons one
striped finch, new
minutes from the vault. We lived
intensely & intensely joined. Had you
lived otherwise you would have missed
the great thing, more perhaps. Your fate
would have written something else—



Topaz Omega, *a painting by Tim Sandow, whose work is on view this month at Kunsthalle Gevelsberg, in Germany. Sandow's monograph* Blind Date *was published last year by Kerber Verlag.*

Courtesy the artist, Galerie Droste, and private collection



"All the News
That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

Late Edition

Today, mostly sunny and seasonable, light breeze, high 60. **Tonight,** partly cloudy, low 49. **Tomorrow,** cloudy and breezy, rain at night, high 57. Weather map, Page A20.

VOL. CLXXI .... No. 59,225 © 2021 The New York Times Company NEW YORK, THURSDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2021 $3.00

THE INCREDIBLE DISAPPEARING DOOMSDAY

How the climate catastrophists learned to stop worrying and love the calm

By Kyle Paoletta

The first signs that the mood was brightening among the corps of reporters called to cover one of the gravest threats humanity has ever faced appeared in the summer of 2021. "Climate change is not a pass/fail course," Sarah Kaplan wrote in the *Washington Post* on August 9. "There is no chance that the world will avoid the effects of warming—we're already experiencing them—but neither is there any point at which we are doomed." Writing in the *Guardian* a few days later, Rebecca Solnit highlighted a paragraph from a recent report published by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) that said carbon-dioxide removal technology could theoretically "reverse . . . some aspects of climate change." Though she admitted this was "a long shot" that would require "heroic effort, unprecedented cooperation, and visionary commitment," Solnit nevertheless concluded, "It is possible to do. And we know how to do it."

In the following months, a new mode of environmental reporting bloomed: the age of climate optimism was upon us. Elizabeth Weil captured the shift in a 2022 *New York* magazine story about how everyday people ought to contend with the crisis. Weil catalogued the usual depredations of her beat: fleeing a Marin County meditation retreat after wildfires fouled the air, crying about the gloomy future in the serenity of Houston's Rothko Chapel. But her mood lifted during a rally marking the seventeenth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. In rapturous terms, she described the scene under a highway overpass in New Orleans:

> Flagboy Giz rapped about gentrification in his Wild Tchoupitoulas Mardi Gras Indian headdress. A woman sold shrimp and grits out of hotel pans. A man stood and watched for hours, a sleeping toddler on his shoulder. Nothing here looked like climate action. It looked like perseverance.

Each participant was contributing to what the activist Heather McTeer Toney called a "jazz sense of chaos" response to a warming world. "I'm playing the flute. Someone else over here is beating drums," Toney told Weil. "We need those saxophonists that are going to do whatever the hell they feel like they want to do."

In the media, writers and editors have also been uncasing their instruments. Last May the *Washington Post* executive editor Sally Buzbee announced an expansion of the paper's Climate Solutions vertical, an initiative designed to highlight people and organizations "offering hope for the future" while at the same time "empowering readers to understand how they can make a difference." To date, the section has run stories on the effort to ban plastic utensils and a Milwaukee-based reward program for informants of illegal dumping.

Kyle Paoletta is working on a book about the cities of the Southwest, to be published by Pantheon in 2024.

Opposite page: *Bad News for the Planet,* a painting by Sho Shibuya on the front page of the *New York Times* from October 28, 2021, shortly after the United Nations released its Emissions Gap Report. All artwork © The artist

More recently, the *Post* debuted Climate Coach, an advice column "about the environmental choices we face in our daily lives." In the *Los Angeles Times,* the energy reporter Sammy Roth embraced the can-do turn in climate coverage. "Anyone who reads my stories knows I'm biased toward climate solutions, and my reporting flows from that," Roth wrote. The happiest warrior of them all, the *New York Times*'s Nicholas Kristof, weighed in with a column titled "Cheer Up! The World Is Better Off Than You Think." With global solar power capacity anticipated to nearly triple in five years, a breakthrough in the development of nuclear fusion, and advancements in battery storage, Kristof wrote that we were experiencing a "revolution of renewables": "Progress is possible when we put our shoulder to it," he concluded. "Onward!"

The sea change culminated last October, in the form of the *New York Times Magazine*'s annual climate issue, which featured comic-book-style depictions of "The New World" that climate change would create, illustrated by Anuj Shrestha and annotated by David Wallace-Wells. "Not very long ago," Wallace-Wells wrote, some scientists believed that emissions "could cause four or five degrees Celsius of warming, giving rise to existential fears about apocalyptic futures." Now a two-to-three-degree range was more likely, "thanks to a global political awakening, an astonishing decline in the price of clean energy, a rise in global policy ambition and revisions to some basic modeling assumptions."

> WHERE ONCE THE CLIMATE CORPS GAVE SUMMARIES OF DAUNTING RESEARCH, NOW THEY OFFER ASSURANCES OF PROGRESS

Shrestha visualized the future implicit in those projections, from the banal (palm trees growing in London, wind turbines off Coney Island) to the bleak (bleached coral reefs, desertification) to the already happening (a line of silhouetted migrants fleeing their homelands). The outlook was ambiguous, an idea Wallace-Wells expanded upon in a stand-alone essay titled "Beyond Catastrophe." "We have cut expected warming almost in half in just five years," he asserted. Now the culture was entering a new phase, one that traded alarmism and denialism for sober consideration of the adjustments required by a world whose transformation, however profound, would fall "mercifully short of true climate apocalypse."

What made this contribution to the new mode so significant was its source: not so long ago, the same David Wallace-Wells was exalted as the most influential oracle of climate apocalypse. Just five years before writing "Beyond Catastrophe," he had published a much-discussed *New York* magazine cover story, "The Uninhabitable Earth," which became the most read feature in the magazine's history. From its startling lede ("It is, I promise, worse than you think") to its section headings ("Heat Death," "Unbreathable Air," "Perpetual War," "Economic Collapse"), the article constituted an index of the planet's future immiseration.

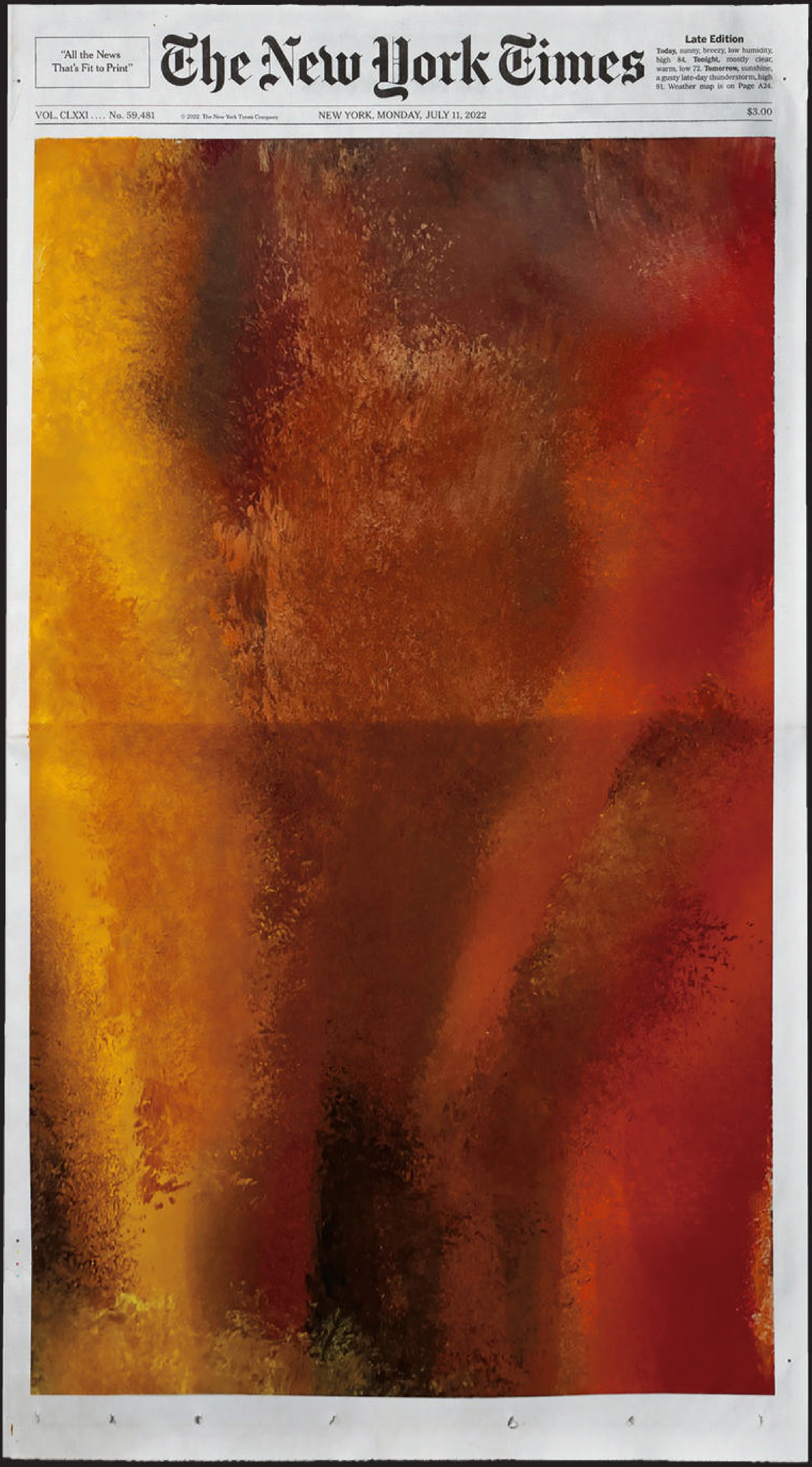
"Two degrees of warming used to be considered the threshold of catastrophe: tens of millions of climate refugees unleashed upon an unprepared world," Wallace-Wells wrote in that piece. "Now two degrees is our goal." For that reason, he shunned "the timid language of scientific probabilities," and focused not on what the world would look like under two or three degrees of warming, but under numbers that seem outlandish now—at one point contemplating the human carnage of an eleven- or twelve-degree spike. The scientific underpinnings of his projections got wobblier the further he ranged from the direct effects on the weather. With five degrees of warming, he wrote, the planet "would have at least half again as many wars as we do today." Turning seaward, he mused, "when the pH of human blood drops as much as the oceans' pH has over the past generation, it induces seizures, comas, and sudden death."

However jarring it is to compare this with the rosy picture in "Beyond Catastrophe," Wallace-Wells is hardly the only journalist whose framing of the climate crisis has transformed in recent years. Where once the climate corps provided weary summations of daunting research, now they offer assurances that progress has been made and the future may be just fine. Given how quickly the tone has shifted, the average news consumer might assume that something fundamental has changed. Perhaps, thanks to all those new solar fields and international summits, a carbon-neutral future is already on the horizon.

Unfortunately, that is not the case. Global emissions have plateaued at a level that will likely produce 1.5 degrees of warming, meaning that billions of people will suffer. That isn't good news in any sense of the phrase—it's not good and it's not even really news. Indeed, it is precisely the earlier work of the climate catastrophists that makes the present reality seem novel and agreeable. The facts have remained the same; only the story has changed.

The last time the tone of the conversation changed this drastically, it happened even more abruptly, over the course of a single night in 2016. "Pessimists will find abundant support for despair this morning," the MIT researcher John Sterman announced the day after Donald Trump's election. "It is now virtually certain the world will not meet any of its climate targets," John Abraham wrote in the *Guardian.* In *The Atlantic,*

Opposite page: *Yosemite,* a painting by Sho Shibuya on the front page of the *New York Times* from July 11, 2022, as a wildfire swept through Yosemite National Park



"All the News
That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

Late Edition

Today, sunny, breezy, low humidity, high 84. **Tonight,** mostly clear, warm, low 72. **Tomorrow,** sunshine, a gusty late-day thunderstorm, high 91. Weather map is on Page A24.

VOL. CLXXI . . . . No. 59,481

© 2022 The New York Times Company

NEW YORK, MONDAY, JULY 11, 2022

$3.00

Clare Foran called Trump's victory a "triumph of climate denial."

In the decade leading up to that election, the infuriating tendency of outlets to include quotes from fringe climate change skeptics had started to fade, allowing reporters to shed their defensive posture and explain what climate change was actually doing to the planet. During the Obama years, dispatches from Greenland and the Great Barrier Reef took the form of ever more explicit warnings. Once Trump took office, though, those fact-based stories began to alchemize into pseudoscientific visions of catastrophe.

In the early months of 2017, journalists catalogued a crack in an Antarctic ice shelf that had advanced seventeen miles in two months, the rapid thawing of Alaska's permafrost, and the most destructive fire season in California's history (which has since been surpassed—twice). The tipping point came that summer, when Trump pulled the United States out of the Paris accords and Hurricane Harvey sat over southeastern Texas for four days, dumping sixty inches of rain and killing dozens of people. To many Americans, it felt like climate change was suddenly happening everywhere, and the government was simply exacerbating the crisis.

A SENSE OF FATALISM CAME INTO VOGUE, MAKING CONTEMPLATION OF CLIMATE APOCALYPSE A LUCRATIVE PURSUIT

With the present spinning out of control, writers began to cast a baleful eye toward the future. In 2017, Bill McKibben—one of the first journalists to alert the public to the dangers of a changing climate in the Eighties—wrote,

> Our current business-as-usual trajectory takes us to a world that's about 3.5C warmer. That is to say, even if we kept the promises we made at Paris … we're going to build a planet so hot that we can't have civilisations.

That prognosis came just months after Wallace-Wells had written that without "a significant adjustment" to how billions of humans lived, "parts of the Earth will likely become close to uninhabitable, and other parts horrifically inhospitable, as soon as the end of this century."

The prophecies of Gehenna were both global—extreme heat becoming pervasive everywhere, from D.C. to Delhi—and hyperlocal, with Jon Mooallem leading a story in the *Times Magazine* with a map in which sea levels had risen by a fantastical two hundred feet, leaving San Francisco an archipelago, its famous hills now craggy islands overlooking the "Bay of Castro" and "Richmond Sound." Even as Mooallem acknowledged that the "entire premise was unscientific; for now, it is unthinkable that seas will rise so high so quickly," the way the map forced him to reconceive of his home catalyzed his sense that "the future we've been warned about is beginning to saturate the present."

Against this backdrop, a sense of fatalism came into vogue, making contemplation of climate apocalypse a lucrative pursuit for writers of all stripes. "The Uninhabitable Earth" was adapted into a book that spent six weeks on the bestseller list, while "Losing Earth," Nathaniel Rich's *Times Magazine* cover story on the federal government's inaction in the face of overwhelming scientific evidence was optioned by Apple TV. Allegory gained new currency in Hollywood, with Netflix's *Don't Look Up* skewering politicians' unwillingness to contend with the obvious danger of an approaching asteroid and TNT's *Snowpiercer* demonstrating how contemporary economic hierarchies would only grow more calcified during global disaster.

Literary writers similarly took up the mantle of Cassandra. Poems were published with such titles as "Letter to Someone Living Fifty Years from Now" and "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Glacier (after Wallace Stevens)." In "Romance #1," Eunsong Kim wrote, "i/keep waiting for capitalism to end/but it won't end" before going on to list everything that would end, including "Hispid Hares/Starfish shaped like stars/Inconvenience/Wrinkles/Sunken cheeks/Living corals." Rich teenagers in Lydia Millet's *A Children's Bible*, published in 2020, discuss the number of generators their families installed in their survival compounds while the novel's narrator frets about looping her kid brother in on the end of the world. "It was a Santa Claus situation," Millet writes. "One day he'd find out the truth. And if it didn't come from me, I'd end up looking like a politician." Jenny Offill's *Weather*, also from 2020, tracks the transformation of its librarian protagonist into "a crazy doomer" as she accompanies the host of a podcast called *Hell and High Water* to a series of increasingly frenzied speaking engagements. Eventually, the librarian realizes her sense of living on the brink of disaster has grown so acute that "the fact that there are six thousand miles of New York sewers and all of them lie well below sea level has become my go-to conversational gambit."

Naturally, the storm clouds hanging over the arts couldn't help but circulate back to the media. When I spoke to Elizabeth Weil this winter, she said that her decision to apply for a job covering climate change in California for ProPublica in 2020 was based partially on "living in the Bay Area, where these wildfires were happening and my kids weren't going to school because of air quality," and partially on reading *Weather*. "Offill was essentially asking, How do we write about this?" Weil told me. "What other notes can we be hitting to get people to pay more attention to this overwhelming issue that's really hard to think about?"

Many of Weil's peers share this impulse—not just to cover the facts of climate change, but to make readers really feel its impact. Not long after Wallace-Wells's more sober take on the planet's future was published in the *Times Magazine,* I asked him how it was possible that his oracular vision of the next century had changed so much in just five years. He said his reassessment of the situation actually dated to 2019, mere months after the book version of "The Uninhabitable Earth" came out, when he published a piece titled "We're Getting a Clearer Picture of the Climate Future—and It's Not as Bad as It Once Looked." Still, Wallace-Wells insists that all his reporting on climate issues has been animated by a desire to share "what the science says is possible." After reading the IPCC's 2013 physical science report, as well as the research that followed, Wallace-Wells said he was spooked. "Scientists were quite focused on some really harrowing four, five, even six, seven, eight degree warming scenarios. Which I think really did point us to a different future than anything but what the most committed activists had permitted themselves to imagine." (In other interviews, Wallace-Wells has also copped to allowing a general feeling of pessimism to color his work, connecting the tone of "The Uninhabitable Earth" to Trump's election and his father's death in 2016.)

Now, Wallace-Wells contends, the science has evolved. "It felt to me like really important news," he said, "that, in a relatively short amount of time, the world's energy modelers and climate scientists had pretty dramatically revised our expectations of warming this century." Jake Silverstein, the editor of the *New York Times Magazine,* agrees with that assessment. "I don't think of this piece as essentially a critique of his previous work for being alarmist," he told me. "I see this piece as David doing one of the most important things we can do in this complicated field of climate journalism, which is to be willing to revisit past assumptions, because they are always changing."

Did the science really change? Or was there simply a shift in how a handful of influential journalists interpreted it? The answer has to do with a set of future emissions scenarios called Representative Concentration Pathways, or RCPs, that are embedded in every IPCC report and numbered according to the predicted total energy in the earth's climate system in 2100, relative to the preindustrial era. Since 1990, the IPCC has tracked four different RCPs, from RCP2.6, in which warming is significantly limited, to RCP8.5, where the emitters keep on emitting and the planet heats at a rapid clip. Though some independent studies have described RCP8.5 as "business as usual," the 2013 IPCC report referred to it merely as "one scenario with very high greenhouse gas emissions."

While RCP8.5 did indeed represent a worst-case projection—one in which, rather than transitioning to green energy, the world became ever more reliant on coal—at no point did the IPCC researchers assign relative probability to it, since it was intended only as a point of comparison. As Glen Peters and Zeke Hausfather wrote in a 2020 *Nature* paper, it was used to "benchmark climate models over an extended period of time, by keeping future scenarios consistent." In fact, very little has changed in the climate modeling done by the IPCC since it began. Roger Pielke Jr. and Justin Ritchie, two researchers whose work has been central to debunking catastrophism, note that "the future envisioned by the IPCC has remained remarkably static," with the range of possible temperature increases moving from between 2.9 and 6.2 degrees Celsius in 1990 to between 3 and 5.1 degrees Celsius in 2021.

All of this helps to explain why so many scientists were aghast at the extremity of the vision Wallace-Wells laid out in 2017. "Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence," wrote the University of Pennsylvania environmental science professor Michael Mann. "The article fails to produce it." The atmospheric scientist J. Marshall Shepherd tweeted, "Over the top alarmist articles about climate change are just as irresponsible as baseless skeptic claims." The glaciologist Peter Neff noted the "significant literary license" that Wallace-Wells had taken, while Christopher Colose of the Goddard Institute for Space Studies was more pointed, calling the "nightmare scenarios" in the article "simply ridiculous." "A 'business-as-usual' climate in 1-2 centuries still looks markedly different than the current one," Colose continued, "but there's no reason yet to think much of the world will become uninhabitable or look like a science fiction novel."

"In the big picture," Wallace-Wells told me, "RCP8.5 never should have been described as 'business as usual.' " The closest he came to writing as much in last year's *Times Magazine* piece was a passing reference to "revisions to some basic modeling assumptions." Wallace-Wells seems to accept these revisions while also diminishing them, emphasizing the small number of people responsible for them and calling out Roger Pielke Jr. as a "frequent Republican witness at congressional climate hearings." The numerous scientists who took direct issue with "The Uninhabitable Earth" go unmentioned.

Though Wallace-Wells does pass along Hausfather's estimation that "about half of our perceived progress has come from revising these [warming] trajectories downward," the justification given for his newfound bullishness is the growing influence

"All the News
That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

Late Edition

Today, clouds and sun, thunderstorms, high 92. **Tonight,** partly cloudy, humid, low 80. **Tomorrow,** partly sunny skies, thunderstorms, high 94. Weather map, Page B7.

VOL. CLXXI .... No. 59,509 © 2022 The New York Times Company NEW YORK, MONDAY, AUGUST 8, 2022 $3.00

SENATE VOTE PUTS CLIMATE ACTION IN REACH

of activists such as Greta Thunberg and the net-zero commitments that have been made by governments and corporations around the world, never mind the probability of those commitments ever being fulfilled—a gap between intention and action that Thunberg herself has highlighted repeatedly. In her speech at the 2021 Youth4Climate Summit, Thunberg cast the climate promises of the powerful as a whole lot of "blah blah blah." Elizabeth Kolbert included the speech in an overview of the current state of the crisis published in *The New Yorker* last fall. "To say that amazing work is being done to combat climate change and to say that almost no progress has been made is not a contradiction," Kolbert writes; "it's a simple statement of fact."

Kolbert's article is organized around the alphabet, with the entry for the letter *d* reading, in its entirety: "*Despair* is unproductive. It is also a sin." Under *n,* for *Narratives,* she cites evidence demonstrating that "a diet of bad news leads to paralysis, which yields yet more bad news." Positive stories, on the other hand,

> can also become self-fulfilling. People who believe in a brighter future are more likely to put in the effort required to achieve it. When they put in that effort, they make discoveries that hasten progress. Along the way, they build communities that make positive change possible.

Navigating this terrain is tricky for a journalist—how to tell a story that resists fatalism but doesn't veer into advocacy? "The place I draw the line," said the *Los Angeles Times*'s Sammy Roth, "is support for *particular* solutions. It's not my job to say large scale solar installations are better than rooftop solar or vice versa." At the same time, he said, "I want my journalism to have the result of helping to spur policies and technologies and a societal shift that reduces emissions."

In the eyes of many, stories like "The Uninhabitable Earth" can have a similar effect. "David got a ton of pushback for that original piece but he also got a real conversation going that was necessary and helpful," Weil told me. "People engaged with that story that hadn't been engaging with the climate crisis, which is of great utility." Of course, many specious stories get conversations going, particularly if you count "pushback" from experts as part of the conversation. What gets left out entirely are the costs of catastrophism—not just politically or socially but psychologically. Not to mention a further erosion of trust in journalism among precisely those people who need to be convinced that the problem we face is urgent and real.

For her part, Weil said that her recent feature was "very explicitly an experiment" in breaking down the binary between "doomism" and "blind hope." That's where the "jazz sense of chaos" comes in, as an inchoate model for responding to crisis. "You have to pull on these deep parts of humanity that are where the determination to survive comes from, outside the realm of the hard sciences where the climate discussion had happened for so long."

Given the totalizing nature of the climate story, it's natural that there should be a wide variety of approaches to covering it, and it is admirable that writers are willing to take risks to write about the topic from differing perspectives, even if their efforts might appear misguided in retrospect. "If you look at our climate pieces over the years," Silverstein told me, "you sometimes find pieces that are in gentle contradiction with each other—I think that itself is a reflection of us trying to have some journalistic humility in approaching something as vast and complex as climate change." A range of views and analyses in one outlet is normal. More concerning is when an individual journalist sidesteps accountability for getting a story wrong.

It's unlikely that today's cautiously optimistic climate journalism will ripple through society quite as profoundly as the catastrophic mode did. Netflix surely isn't cutting a $100 million check for a version of *Don't Look Up* about an asteroid that might miss us. But the new climate journalism isn't any more responsible. The world has yet to demonstrate the political will to save itself; stories that give readers the misleading impression that things will be just fine are overcorrecting for our prior fatalism, and risk replacing it with complacency. Writers like Wallace-Wells want us to believe that their own doom-peddling has chastened the world into a response that hasn't actually occurred. The best course for many journalists may be to take a break from narratives and reconnect with the science.

It is, I promise, not quite as bad as you once imagined, but it is worse than you've lately been led to believe. The seas will rise, the summers will get hotter. There will be more red-sky days, more storms, more jungles turned into savannas and savannas turned into deserts. Global emissions may peak in a few years, but the subsequent decline will probably be too gradual to limit warming to even 2.5 degrees Celsius—the level that the United Nations projects the world's net-zero pledges currently put it on track to reach. None of that constitutes an apocalypse, but it does suggest a world destabilized by hundreds of millions of people going hungry and being forced to flee their homes. The media's job, in this moment, is not to raise alarms or offer assurances. It is to document the ongoing mutilation of our planet, and to push citizens, politicians, and corporations to stanch the carnage. Everything else is style that detracts from the substantive peril of the present. ■

Opposite page: *Good News,* a painting by Sho Shibuya on the front page of the *New York Times* from August 8, 2022, after the Senate passed a landmark climate bill

"America's most interesting magazine."

"An unexpectedly excellent magazine that stands out in part because of its wide range, in style and substance, amid a homogenizing media landscape."

— *THE NEW YORK TIMES*

Subscribe now and get a year of *Harper's Magazine* in print and online, including 172 years of archives to explore.

[HARPERS.ORG/TIMES]

HARPER'S
MAGAZINE

1958

THEY WILL SEE IT COMING

By Betty Friedan

This is the story of two scientists. Their search began five years ago with a single radiocarbon clue from the ocean floor. It led over many continents and seas, to drowned rivers and abandoned mountain caves. These two serious, careful scientists—Maurice Ewing and William Donn—believe they have finally found the explanation for the giant glaciers that once covered America with a wall of ice up to two miles thick, moving mountains and trampling forests. If they are right, the world is now heading into another Ice Age.

The first clues came to light on the deck of their three-masted research schooner. In the summer of 1953, the ship traced a puzzling pattern on the ocean floor. The crew were working with their newly perfected deep sea piston corer, a device which can dredge up undisturbed primeval sediment through as much as four thousand fathoms of water. In some cores of mud, they kept seeing a strange sharp line. “About a foot below the floor of the ocean the sediment suddenly changed from salmon pink to gray,” Ewing said. “We found out what that razor-sharp line meant: at a certain time the ocean suddenly changed from cold to warm.” But what could change the climate of the whole ocean so abruptly?

Neither Ewing nor Donn can say precisely when the hunch came. The chain of thought seems obvious now: water freezing—ice going out—a sharp, abrupt change. But oceans don’t normally freeze. Ocean currents dissipate the cold—except, of course, in the small Arctic Ocean. “What would happen if the ice went out of the Arctic Ocean?” Ewing and Donn remember wondering. “If the Arctic Ocean were open water, warmed by the Atlantic, warmer than the land around it, water would evaporate and fall as snow on the land. More snow on Greenland and northern Canada would make glaciers grow.… And suddenly we had the startling hunch that the Arctic Ocean *was* open during the Ice Age. And that it froze over only 11,000 years ago. It was this freezing over of the Arctic Ocean which so suddenly warmed the Atlantic—and ended the Ice Age.”

Ewing and Donn realized that their theory had startling implications for the future. We may have been watching an Ice Age approach for some time without realizing it. Scientists have observed an increasingly rapid warming of the ocean. Warm water flowing north has driven the codfish off Cape Cod to Newfoundland; the annual temperature has risen significantly in Iceland and Greenland; the Hudson River no longer freezes over as it used to.

If Ewing and Donn are right, for the first time in the history of the world, the victims of an Ice Age will see it coming. Television cameramen will be raging all over the far north, covering the breakup of the Arctic ice sheet. The Ice Age will dawn not in crashing glacial terror but in dirty slush; on a summer vacation up north, you will simply see a lot of snow that for the first time in thousands of years didn’t quite melt. In many parts of America, the worry may not be ice, but water. Scientists have speculated about the ocean flood that will occur if the melting of glacial ice caps continues. One scientist recently warned that “if all the ice were melted into the sea, its level would rise from one hundred fifty to two hundred feet. All the world’s seaports and much of its most densely populated areas would be submerged.”

After the flood subsides, the only immediate effect the Ice Age will have on us down here will be more rain. The new Arctic moisture will swell the rivers and water the deserts. But then, gradually, our weather will cool. Icy winds will blow from the advancing glaciers; the great snows will fall farther and farther south. In several thousand years a two-mile ice sheet may cover the United States and Europe. If man finds no way to switch the glacial thermostat, there may well be a real estate boom in the Sahara. ■

From “The Coming Ice Age,” which appeared in the September 1958 issue of Harper’s Magazine. *The complete article—along with the magazine’s entire 172-year archive—is available online at harpers.org/archive.*

Time-saving Tools to Make Your Home Shine!

Includes
32 oz. shampoo

The Instant Rug Rejuvenator

This is the patented deep-cleaning brush that teams with a professional-strength waterless shampoo to rejuvenate rugs without backbreaking labor. The shampoo dries into crystals that are easily vacuumed. 50" L x 10¼" W x 3¼" D.

Item #91289 $49.95

★★★★☆

The Most Powerful Handheld Car Vacuum

This is the handheld car vacuum with the same amount of power as a standard upright unit. Its 500-watt motor provides vacuuming power that cleans a vehicle's interior with a flexible 18" hose and included attachments. AC plug with 12' cord. 16½" L x 5½" W x 4" D. (3 lbs.)

Item #95440 $199.95

EXCLUSIVE

★★★★★

The Countertop Dishwasher

Only available from Hammacher Schlemmer, this miniature dishwasher provides the cleaning power and convenience of a full-sized unit. Plugs into standard wall outlet and hooks up to a sink's faucet. 21¾" W x 19¾" D x 17¾" H. (48 lbs.)

Item #96704 $429.95

EXCLUSIVE

Handle extends
to 46½"

★★★★★

The Cordless Telescoping Power Scrubber

Available only from Hammacher Schlemmer, this is the electronic power scrubber that effortlessly removes stubborn dirt, scum, and grime.

Its polypropylene brush spins at 290 rpm to quickly clean surfaces. Its telescoping handle extends from 41"- 46½" and its interchangeable heads reach into crevices and corners.

Item #96760 $79.95

Hammacher Schlemmer

Guaranteeing the Best, the Only, and the Unexpected for 175 Years.

15% OFF

On Orders of $99 or More*

Order at hammacher.com
or call 1-866-409-5548
Use promo code **HAR234**
Offer ends 5/31/2023

BEST ONLINE SHOPS 2023 Newsweek statista

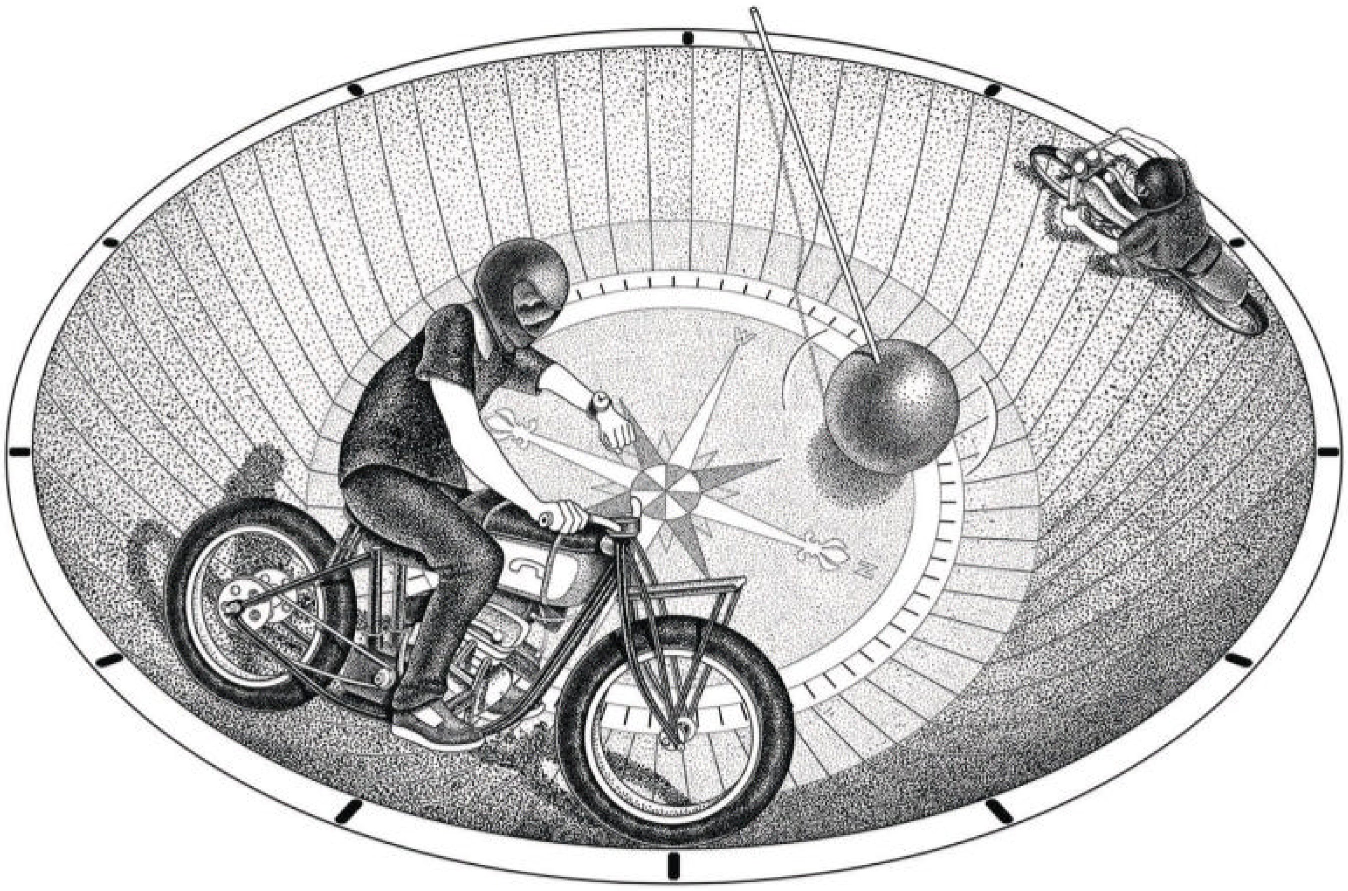
*Prices subject to change.
Visit www.hammacher.com/terms for full terms and conditions.

23-HAR-0401-HAR234

IN SEARCH OF LOST TIME

The science of the perfect second

By Tom Vanderbilt



When I was a kid, in the touch-tone era in the Midwest, I often dialed, for no real reason, the "time lady"—an actress named Jane Barbe, it turns out—who would announce, with prim authority "at the tone," the correct time to the second. I was, in those days, a bit obsessed with time. I would stare, transfixed, at the Foucault pendulum at Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry as it swept slow traces through its day; or gawp at the patinaed green clock, topped by a scythe and hourglass-carrying temporal patriarch and marked with a single word—TIME—that adorned the Jewelers Building on East Wacker Drive. But nothing felt so immediate, so curiously satisfying, as having the exact time delivered through the intimacy of the phone's earpiece. Yet it left me with a gnawing inquiry: How does she know what time it is? I imagined that time emanated, like the Emergency Alert System, from some secure government facility, possibly underground.

I wasn't entirely wrong. This summer, after five decades of wondering what drove clock time, I found myself at the nation's temple of timekeeping: the Joint Institute for Laboratory Astrophysics in Boulder, Colorado. JILA (it rhymes with Willa) is a research institute operated by the University of Colorado and the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), a large and relatively little-known federal agency that plays a significant, if quiet, role in our everyday lives.

The night before my visit, I'd opened time.gov, the very official-looking page—headlined OFFICIAL U.S. TIME—run by NIST and the

Tom Vanderbilt is the author, most recently, of Beginners: The Joy and Transformative Power of Lifelong Learning.

Illustrations by Dima Kashtalyan

U.S. Naval Observatory. The site features a map of the United States, divided into time zones, as well as a variety of subsidiary clock displays (Chamorro Standard Time, Aleutian Standard Time) that ticked, at the second level, in seeming synchrony. I noticed that my own watch—the Garmin Forerunner 935, a "premium running watch," which generally gets its time from four of the thirty-one operational GPS satellites encircling the globe—looked to be a second behind. Why?

This was one of the first questions I put to Judah Levine, an eighty-two-year-old JILA physicist and one of "America's timekeepers." "The handheld guys are typically wrong by a second or a half-second," Levine said. "That's because the device's display is not fast enough." He said this with weary resignation. White-haired, with gold-rimmed glasses, wearing a blue flannel shirt, gray work pants, and sturdy black shoes, Levine reminded me of one of those somewhat cantankerous master craftsmen you still find in certain old quarters of Brooklyn. The shelves of his office were lined with physics textbooks, and an Oregon Scientific clock—which gets a radio signal from NIST—displayed the time in blocky liquid-crystal numbers.

In fairness to my watch, Levine explained that time.gov (which had informed me that the laptop I was using had strayed "+0.012 s") was itself off by a noticeable amount. "It takes a while for the signal to transfer across the network, which we don't control," he explained. The actual correct time was on display in a laboratory adjacent to Levine's office. It appeared as a string of red digits on a device that looked like a high-end stereo amplifier. This was a display of the official time, which is kept by a series of cesium fountain atomic clocks a few miles away, at NIST's Boulder campus, and sent via satellite to JILA. Here was the seat of temporal power, the nation's pulsing metronome. I watched the red LED seconds tick away, bathing in their implacable authority. It was then, however, that Levine introduced another complication. The time we were looking at might actually, a month from now, be deemed incorrect.

The official time of the United States is subordinate to what's known as UTC, or Coordinated Universal Time, which, since the early Sixties, has been the world's official time standard. Realized and disseminated by the French Bureau International des Poids et Mesures (BIPM), UTC is an aggregate of times gathered from the atomic clocks maintained by more than eighty national agencies across the globe. "UTC," noted Levine, "is calculated after the fact." This is done partly because it would be too costly, and too logistically complex, to keep the world's clocks ticking as one. But there was another reason, he continued: "Clocks often have misbehavior." Free-running clocks, those that are not frequently recalibrated, begin to subtly "drift," which can be hard to detect in real time. The advantage of having a "retrospective time scale," as Levine calls it, is being able to "look back and detect things that you could never detect in real time."

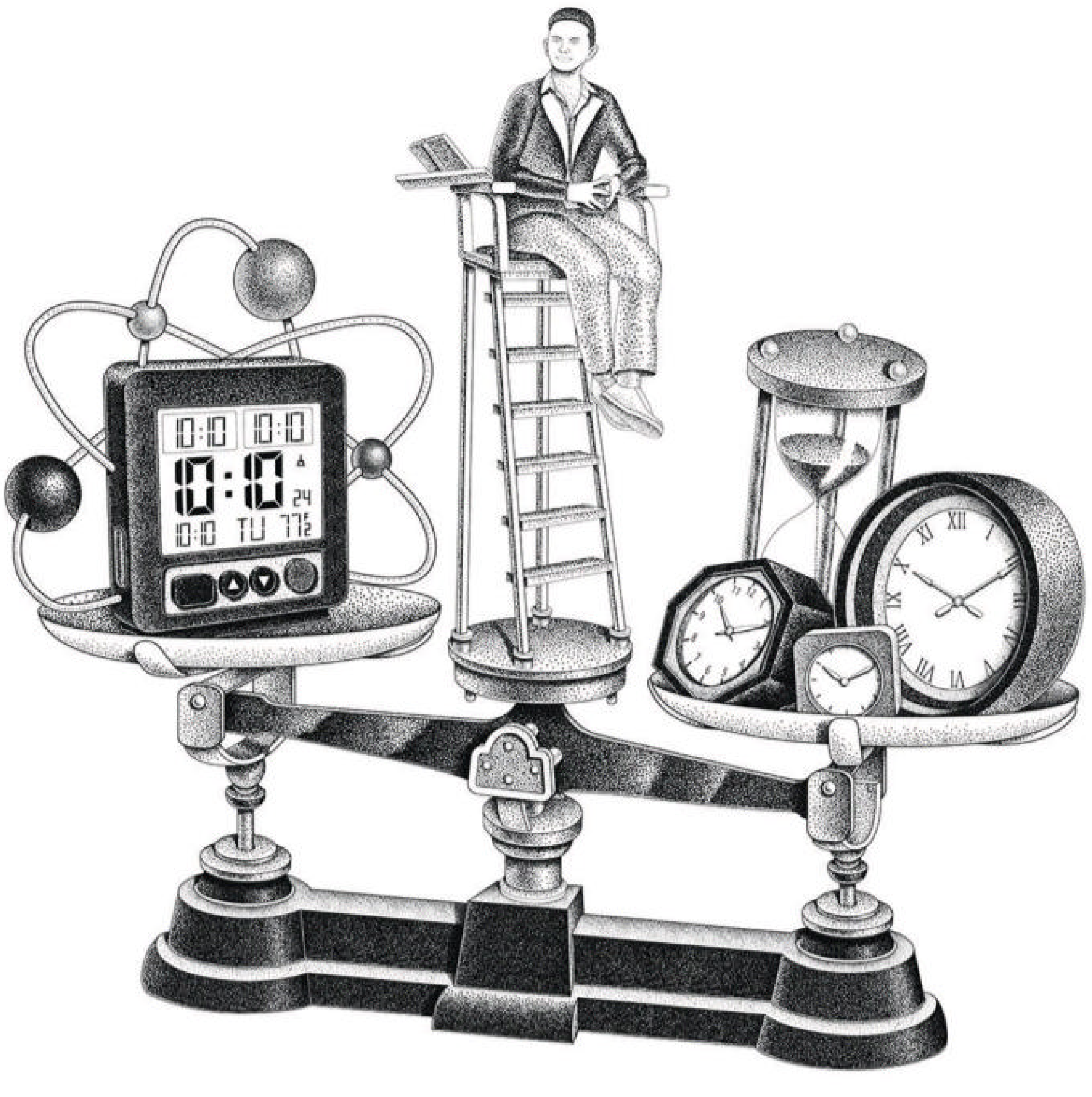
Levine was awaiting the official time data from the previous month, which comes to NIST and similar institutions via a BIPM publication called Circular T. When Levine and his colleagues receive the report, they discuss its implications, and they do not always agree. After a recent dispute—owing, Levine said, to statistical noise, or what he calls "jiggly wigglies"—they chose to recalibrate what's called UTC(NIST) so it would match where UTC was the previous month (or, more precisely, where it should have been in the present). Someone was dispatched to NIST room 2051, the clock room, to enter the correction.

When I suggested that Levine and his colleagues are not so much telling time as forecasting it, he nodded excitedly. "It is exactly forecasting!" This is particularly true given the emergence, a few years ago, of so-called rapid UTC, a weekly provisional dissemination of the world's official time (considered in retrospect) from the authorities in France. NIST, like other laboratories, uses that provisional time to make predictions of where the time will be in the future, but like any forecast, it comes with the risk of being imprecise. If I'd gone to Boulder expecting to find some unassailable master clock, surrounded by druidic time lords reverently conveying its results—the sacred source that had so captured my childhood imagination—what I found instead was rather disconcerting: Time, it would seem, is quite often out of joint.

In addition to keeping the national time, NIST helps maintain the International System of Units—meters, kilograms, and the like. Its headquarters occupies a sprawling sylvan campus in Gaithersburg, Maryland (as the story goes, it was moved from Washington in the Sixties to avoid being destroyed in a nuclear strike). The agency is difficult to categorize. Its workforce is filled with experimental and theoretical physicists, but it is technically part of the Department of Commerce. It is a purely advisory, not regulatory, body, and the standards it works on are not those you might imagine: NIST does not tell industry groups what the strength or the tolerance of their materials should be, it determines how the strength or tolerance of those materials should be measured. The agency's job, according to Katrice Lippa, the chief of NIST's Office of Weights and Measures, is to "publish the standard of how the inspectors are supposed to test devices." In other words, it orchestrates the metastandards.

NIST conducts metrology, the science of measurement. Scientists there measure everything from the blockchain to cloth face masks at a variety of scales. They possess both the world's smallest ruler—a silicon chip used in X-ray diffraction that is accurate to 0.000000000000001 meters—and the world's largest deadweight machine—a towering stack of fifty-thousand-pound stainless steel discs capable of generating up to a million pounds of force. If you need to know how granite holds up after a century you can go to the monumental wall at NIST, which is composed of 2,352 stones taken mostly from a nineteenth-century collection of quarry samples. Care to gawk at one of the world's last surviving original radium standards, a glass ampoule filled with 20.28 milligrams of radium chloride prepared by Marie Curie in 1913? NIST has it in the basement, encased in a steel bathtub, buried under lead bricks.

NIST is a sort of acropolis of the average, a Parnassus of the prototypical. Nowhere is this more evident than in its Standard Reference Materials (SRM) division. Picture a low-lit warehouse whose metal shelves are stocked with thousands of small jars whose sober labels announce contents like "New Jersey Soil Organics and Trace Elements," "Oyster Tissue," and "Domestic Sludge." Every measurable attribute of these materials has been endlessly scrutinized and calibrated, providing benchmarks for the testing of other things. Steven Choquette, the director of the Office of Reference Materials, calls them "truth in a bottle," a sample of which can fetch up to four hundred thousand dollars. Lately, Choquette says, the division has been focusing on biopharmaceuticals, and working on NIST's first SRM for a living material: a Chinese hamster ovary cell line. It is also busily developing "Human Whole Stool" (it's powdered).



For all these painstakingly curated artifacts, some of the most involved work at NIST goes into standardizing and calibrating things that are no longer things: the units of measurement themselves. The International System of Units—ultimately overseen by BIPM—consists of seven "base units." These are: the meter, the kilogram, the ampere, the candela, the mole, the kelvin, and the second. Until relatively recently, one of the most familiar of these units, the kilogram, was calibrated with reference to a physical object. For more than a century, the kilogram was realized by the International Prototype of the Kilogram (IPK), a platinum-iridium cylinder, nearly four centimeters tall, housed in a vault in France. For years, NIST researchers would carry kilogram prototypes overseas to compare them with the IPK. But transporting the kilogram to and fro risked wear and tear that could compromise its mass. In 2019, the kilogram became defined in terms of Planck's constant—a hard value derived from quantum mechanics—making it the last of the base units to surrender its physical artifact.

"We've dematerialized all of our units," said Leon Chao, a NIST researcher. "Now all of our measurements are derived from universal constants." During the dematerialization process, standards were democratized—there was no "one kilogram" in a vault in Paris—but the measurement devices themselves lost their intuitive connection to the things they were measuring. Kevin Chesnutwood, a mechanical engineer with NIST's Mass and Force Group who oversees the deadweight machine, told me that he used to tell schoolchildren on field trips, "Hey, we have this kilogram, and we take it to Paris every few years and compare it against the master." The dematerialized system is much more difficult for the students to grasp, so he tries not to focus on it. "I mean, hell, we can't even understand half of it," he joked.

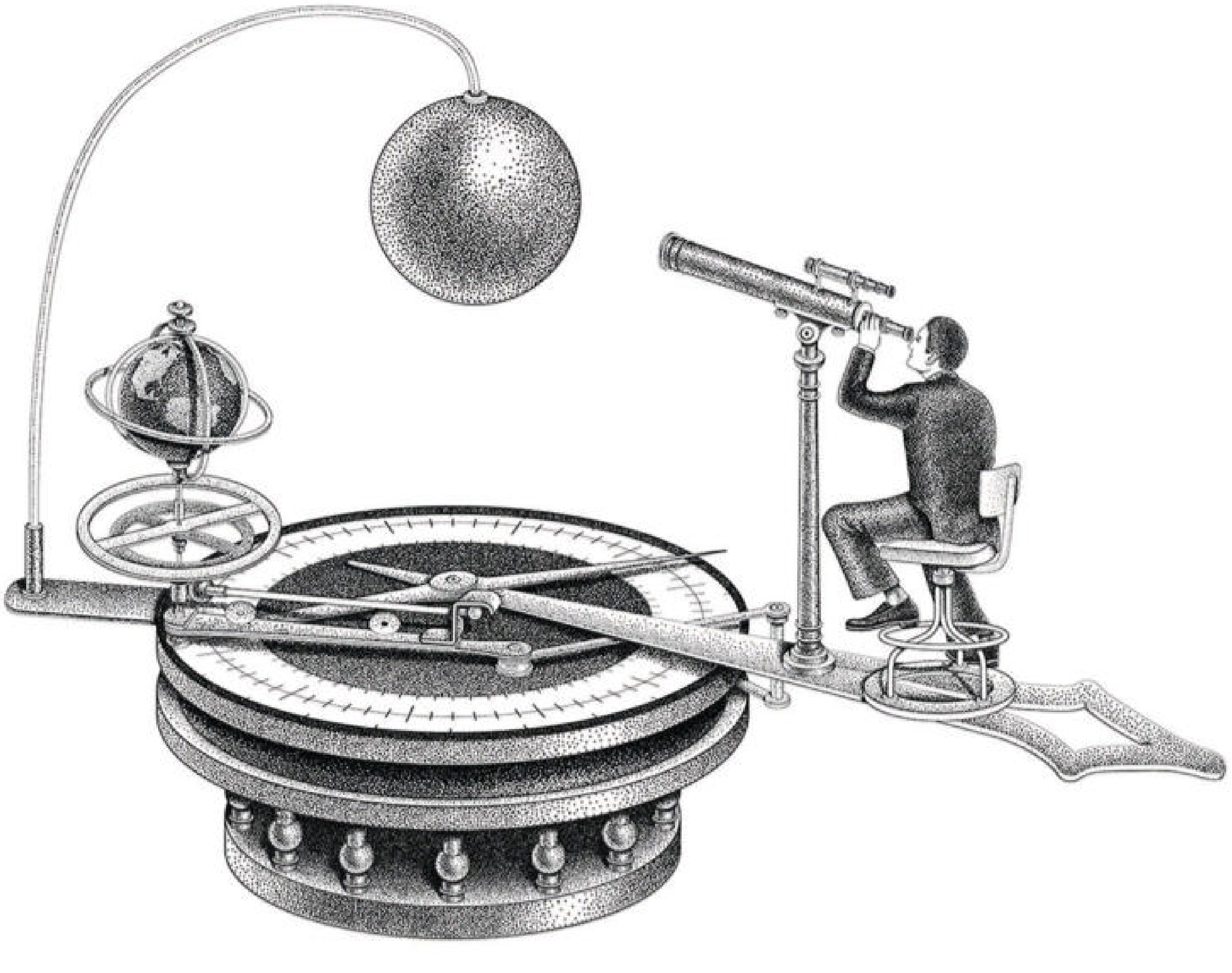
Of all the units that NIST metrologists work on, only one has never had a physical artifact: the second. Listening to NIST scientists, one gets the sense that the second has also stood apart in other ways. Theoretically, "the physicists *could* argue there is only one fundamental unit," Chao told me, with a hint of tentativeness in his voice. "And I think that's time, or frequency."

Frequency, whose base unit is the hertz, could be understood to support all the other standards. "It's very fundamental," Darine El Haddad, a researcher in NIST's Quantum Measurement Division, said. "If you want to measure everything precisely, you have to measure in terms of frequency." The exact measurement of mass is aided by frequency but not vice versa. And there was one final thing, El Haddad told me: "It's the unit you can measure most precisely." There are clocks functioning at an uncertainty level that metrologists working with other units could only dream of.

In this world of metrology, which has left behind the dusty archives of physical things in favor of fundamental properties of the universe, it seems a kind of cosmic joke that this intangible, evanescent unit is the one that is understood most accurately. Even so, there is something amiss in the world of the second, the world of time. In a world of staggering exactitude, there are new timepieces on the horizon, capable of even more accuracy, clocks that are moving beyond mere measurement and opening new inquiries into time, into the universe itself. These machines have helped to drive a creeping suspicion that the second—that fundamental base unit upon which our temporal kingdom is built—despite all the synchronous activity of the world, despite the advent of clocks whose fidelity could theoretically outlast human civilization itself, is not being realized as exactly as it could be. Having come in search of the origin of time, I was learning that the very thing that drives it—the standard second—is flawed.

What makes a second a second? To the mind, a second is fleeting—by the time we pay attention to it, it's already gone. We know it tautologically: a second is a second because our clocks tell us it is (or, perhaps, like children, we count "one, one thousand," at a speed we inexactly deem to be second-like). If pressed, we intuit that it derives from some astronomical interval, which, indeed, it used to. For much of the twentieth century, the second was based on a nineteenth-century standard derived from astronomical calculations: 1/86,400 of a mean solar day. This may sound reassuringly simple and authoritative, but it's built on artifice. Because of Earth's tilt and elliptical orbit, the movement of the sun through the sky produces days of varying lengths. The mean solar day, to smooth out inconsistencies, is derived from the movement of an idealized, hypothetical sun. But this model is not optimal on account of the daily fluctuations in Earth's rotation.

In 1960, a new standard—the ephemeris second—was created, derived from Earth's annual orbit in the tropical year 1900. A tropical year is the length of time it takes Earth to orbit around the sun. Confusingly (like many things in the world of time), it is slightly longer than a calendar year. And if the year 1900 seems an odd choice for a standard made in 1960, it turns out that it's the first year charted in the influential 1898 book *Tables of the Motion of the Earth on Its Axis and Around the Sun*, written by the Canadian-American astronomer Simon Newcomb.



The ephemeris second was less prone to variation, but it had one huge limitation: it could not be seen in action. "From the standpoint of practical metrology, it was a disaster," said Levine. "Okay, the second is defined based on the length of the year 1900—what am I supposed to do with that?" In 1967, at the thirteenth Conférence générale des poids et mesures, it was declared "inadequate for the present needs of metrology."

By then, the world had taken significant strides toward atomic time. The idea of marking frequency via the vibration of hydrogen or sodium particles—which promised to trade the vagaries of the heavens for the unchanging frequencies of atoms—had been theorized since the nineteenth century. By 1949, the first atomic clock was up and running. A decade later, a cesium clock at NIST was supporting the U.S. frequency standard. In 1967, when the Conférence finally killed the ephemeris second, it redefined the second as "the duration of 9,192,631,770 periods of the radiation corresponding to the transition between the two hyperfine levels of the ground state of the caesium 133 atom."

This is the inscrutable, hyperaccurate, modern second that governs our lives today. It represents the culmination of more than a century's effort to standardize and synchronize time frequency, even to fashion it as a commodity. As the historian Peter Galison notes in *Einstein's Clocks, Poincaré's Maps*, it was not until the nineteenth century that minute hands became a common feature of clocks. Time was fluid, subject to local idiosyncracies; passengers at French railway stations were served by a panoply of differing temporal displays (local time, Paris time, train time). But by the late nineteenth century, accuracy was prized. Parisian owners of pneumatic clocks—calibrated by puffs of compressed air sent through pipes—fretted about the fifteen seconds it took the air to reach the clocks. "Synchronized time intervened in peoples' lives the way electric power, sewage, or gas did," writes Galison, "as a circulating fluid of modern urban life." The clock became the "key-machine of the modern industrial age," as Lewis Mumford wrote, enabling the vast expansion of the capitalist mode of production. The uneven, irregular experience of time—what Henri Bergson called *durée*—gave way to an experience of time as a regimented, "independent world of mathematically measurable sequences."

There are clocks at NIST's Boulder laboratory that are projected neither to lose nor to gain a second in three hundred million years. But who needs this kind of staggering precision, this infinitesimal punctuality? Forget the millisecond: most of us, as Levine told me, are not even "one second people." Few things in life are calibrated to such a degree—we don't arrive at a doctor's appointment or a bus stop thinking in intervals of less than a minute. Human awareness of any discrete moment is thought to max out at a tenth of a second. (Nineteenth-century psychology termed this "the personal equation.") By its own account, NIST's timescale "typically differs from UTC by less than three billionths of a second," an error far beyond the perception of most. NIST traffics in the nanosecond, a unit of time comprehended only by machines and relevant only to "serious users," as Levine calls them, those who "care at the nanosecond level," like Wall Street traders, who pay upward of one thousand dollars per month to have a more precise picture of time than the general public.

But even for the rest of us, the second plays a larger role than we might think. Consider GPS: it not only enables any number of essential services in our daily lives—our car's navigation system, our Fitbits, our smartphones—it is one of the means by which standard time is distributed across the globe (the several dozen satellites that make up the system each maintain their own timescales). Synchronizing clocks at a distance has long been a problem. Several decades ago, the process of comparing NIST's master clocks with the time standard involved flying to Paris with two fifty-pound iridium clocks as carry-on baggage. Roughly twice a year, Levine or one of his colleagues would travel from Boulder to France, stopping off at Washington Dulles to check the clocks against the Naval Observatory's timepieces. Once in Paris, Levine would hustle to the offices of the Bureau international de l'heure (the clocks had a twenty-four-hour battery life). There, the clocks would be compared—not by something so crude as the human eye, but by a special machine known as a time interval counter. The clocks thus synced, Levine would return to Boulder. He did this for years, until 1978, when the Air Force launched the first GPS satellite.

For GPS to work, it needs ultra-exact timing: accuracy within fifteen meters requires precision on the order of fifty nanoseconds. The 5G networks powering our mobile phones demand ever more precise levels of cell-tower synchronization or calls get dropped. Meanwhile, increasingly interconnected electrical grids rely on nearly instantaneous timing to provide efficient power delivery and avoid network failures. Any online gamer will be well aware of his system's latency, measured in milliseconds. And as Mumford could have predicted, nowhere has time become so fetishized as in the financial sector, with the emergence over the past decade of algorithmic high-frequency trading. Donald MacKenzie, the author of *Trading at the Speed of Light,* estimated in 2019 that a trading program could receive market data and trigger an order in eighty-four nanoseconds, or eighty-four billionths of a second. This is a far cry from the Nineties, when many of the clocks at brokerage houses time-stamped transactions at a one-minute level of granularity. No, we are not "one-second people." We live in a world that moves much faster than that.

The beating heart of the nation's time is the NIST-F1, one of the cesium fountain clocks that help maintain the standard tick. It has a steampunk vibe, all copper and aluminum and wires and tubes; a joking sign nearby it reads NO PLAYING IN OR AROUND THE FOUNTAIN. As Elizabeth Donley, the chief of NIST's Time and Frequency Division, described it, a ball of cesium atoms, introduced into a vacuum and cooled with lasers, are tossed up and fall back down through a tubular chamber, as in a fountain, while being "interrogated" at the midpoint of their journey by a series of microwaves. "Then you detect the atoms at the end to see if they've changed state," Donley said, which is done by probing them with a laser to see whether they emit light. The interrogating microwave is adjusted to resonate with the atoms. When that resonance is reached, NIST counts, using another instrument, a staggering 9,192,631,770 periods of the microwave field. That's the frequency established in France in 1967; in other words, the second as we know it.

NIST-F1 does not run all the time. Donley said it acts more as a "tuning fork" that calibrates the masers, or microwave lasers, helping to keep them in sync. Masers are a part of the timescale to determine the national standard. There is, in fact, no single clock that keeps official time in the United States. NIST has an ensemble of some twenty atomic clocks, mostly masers and some cesium clocks, spread across its campus, to ensure redundancy in the event of an outage. These all feed into a small room filled with flashing machines. Jeff Sherman, a researcher in NIST's Time Realization and Distribution Group, explained that all the signals coming in—none of which, he said, have "the absolute correct frequency"—are used to calculate a sort of moving average, with the more predictable clocks given a higher weighting. He pointed to a bank of flashing lights. "These devices are really simple," he said. "They just count five million oscillations, flash a light, count five million oscillations." He pointed to one particular blinking light, which, he noted, "indicates the beginning of the second in the United States."

While F1 does not look anything like a traditional clock, or run constantly, it is not, in broad terms, that dissimilar from any other timepiece. "We mark off time by counting periodic events," Donley said. "Whether it's the Earth orbiting the sun to make a year or the Earth spinning to make a day or a pendulum swinging." This one just happens to count the nine-billion-odd times an alkali metal is excited and calls that a second. In the Twenties, Sherman told me, researchers looking for a better resonator for radio frequencies hit upon quartz crystals, which vibrate at a generally reliable frequency. "It was off to the races," he said. Quartz-powered clocks appeared soon after. The idea was to trust objects whose internal rhythms were more stable than those of Earth's movement. And the most stable objects are atoms. What makes them so appealing from a timekeeping perspective, Sherman explained, is that "the hydrogen in Boulder is the same as the hydrogen in Paris and it's the same as the hydrogen we might get twenty years from now. They don't need batteries, they don't wear out. They don't change when you look at them—in their structure, anyway."

Sherman compared atoms to bells. All bells will sound a note when struck, but that note will vary depending on the shape of the bell. When atoms are struck, they produce charged energy; the wavelengths of that energy will vary depending on the shape of the atom. The frequency at which an atom like cesium oscillates is, he said, "kind of arbitrary, and doesn't have anything to do with the second or the hour or the minute. We've just decided we're going to count time by counting those oscillations."

When time was based on astronomy, Levine has written, frequency was a "derived quantity that was implicitly defined by astronomical observations." That began to change as new technologies arrived, like radio waves, that depended more upon frequency (how many events happen in a given time period) than time itself (a way of marking when events happen). For instance, when you listen to KROQ-FM in Los Angeles, at 106.7 on the radio dial, the radio sine waves powering that music are being pumped out at 106,700,000 cycles per second; your radio tuner, set to that station, will resonate at the same frequency. With the rise of frequency, as well as quantum mechanics, time began to be constructed from the ground up, using the infinitesimal frequencies of atoms, rather than from above, using the movement of celestial objects. All this makes F1 staggeringly accurate: it will gain or shed only one second every 100,000,000 years. Since the days when time was defined astronomically, the accuracy of the second is estimated to have increased by a magnitude of eight.

Given our exquisitely realized second, one might assume that the time and frequency folks have moved on to other matters. But the second still suffers from two distinct problems. The first is one of continuity. Every time the second has been redefined, an effort has been made, typically through protracted calculation, to link it to previous versions of the second. Despite the dominance of atomic time, astronomical time scales still exist, and the two are kept in harmony. Levine thinks the most recent handoff presented some issues. "Cesium clocks immediately began running fast with respect to the astronomical timescale," he said. As a result, the international time community has had to insert periodic leap seconds into the scale. Atomic time essentially stops for a full second to allow astronomical time to catch up. (Adding to the confusion, some clocks beat 23:59:59 twice, while others pause at 24:00:00.) Not everyone does it this way. "Places like Google, for example, they smear it out," Donley told me. In other words, rather than stop time, they will subtly adjust the frequency of atomic clocks, "to catch up."

The second, more substantial issue is that even though the current cesium fountain clocks at NIST have seen their accuracy increase by a factor of ten since their inception, there is a new generation of optical clocks that are, according to Donley, about one hundred times more accurate still. Optical clocks work much like atomic clocks, except the interrogating waves are comprised of an optical frequency—i.e., light—that is some one hundred thousand times higher than that of microwaves. The more ticks, the more information, the more precision.

There is a heady competitive rustle in the world of optical clocks, with each research group touting their preferred element—ytterbium! strontium! mercury!—as the One True Frequency. Each has its own virtues and weaknesses. Some are more costly, some are easier to operate. Strontium clocks are stable, which is good for precision measurements. Aluminum ion has one of the lowest systematic uncertainties, but takes a long time to measure. "It's a really odd situation that we have so many clocks that are performing better than the standard can," said David Hume, a NIST physicist who is working on an aluminum ion clock. "That's not the normal thing when working on new measurement standards."

And so, in the labs and conferences and Zoom calls of the metrology world, a conversation has begun once more about how to redefine the standard. Levine broke down the options. "Number one, everybody's got their favorite clock and we declare one to be the winner, all the others to be 'secondary representations,' equal at the 99 percent level," he said. "Number two, I take an average of all the winners and that's the winner. Number three, I don't define a standard of frequency anymore." In other words, define frequency indirectly through some other constant, such as the mass of the electron—except, he says, we can't measure any of these things accurately enough. "My personal vote," he said, "is for the first choice."

It isn't likely that we'll see a new standard second before the end of the decade. International consensus has yet to be forged, the optical clocks are still prototypes, and it is impossible to compare clocks in separate locations without degrading their performance. And for the needs of present industry and society, the current second is fine. But who knows what technologies will come along, and what levels of precision they'll require?

Yet the more precisely time is measured, the less it starts to feel like time at all. Cutting-edge timekeepers, as Sherman told me, "are not really counting seconds," at least not in the sense we would recognize. Rather, physicists studying higher-order problems are "comparing rates of different bells. They want to study the structure of an atom and they need to compare the ringing to our ringing, which is kept to some kind of a standard." He suggested that subtle variations in these ticks might open doors onto "new physics," perhaps helping us to better understand phenomena such as dark matter, that mysterious body that makes up some 85 percent of the total mass of the universe. "A clock accurate to a second over the age of the cosmos," Patrick Gill, a physicist at the U.K.'s National Physical Laboratory, is quoted as saying in *New Scientist*, "would allow tests of whether physical laws and constants have varied over the universe's history."

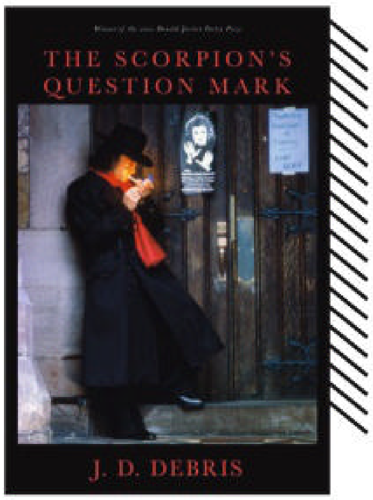
For now, such clocks can at least confirm the old physics. "If you were to lift this clock up a centimeter of elevation," Hume told me, "you would be able to discern a difference in the ticking rate." The reason is Einstein's theory of relativity: Time differs depending on where you are experiencing it. When standing upright, your head exists at a slightly different timescale than your feet. But with this accuracy comes a sobering reality. "There are not just *two* times," notes the physicist Carlo Rovelli in *The Order of Time*. "Times are legion: a different one for every point in space." What we think of the present, he writes, "does not extend throughout the universe." Rather, "it is like a bubble around us." The "well-defined *now*," as he calls it, "is an illusion."

Relativity raises the question of whether we can ever, ultimately and incontrovertibly, know what time it is, or whether it even makes sense to ask. On more than one occasion, in my conversations with physicists, we would get to some nettlesome issue about time, and they would pause and say something along the lines of, "Well, now here it gets philosophical." But they would inevitably retreat to the safe harbor of metrology. "What we think about time," as the NIST book *From Sundials to Atomic Clocks* puts it, "is less important to defining it than how we measure it." I had come looking for certainty, but I kept finding its opposite. "In metrology," Chao told me, "the name of the game is, at the end of the day, what's your uncertainty?" Accuracy, in measuring the kilogram or the second, is perhaps less about knowing you are right than about having an achingly exact understanding of how often you are likely to be wrong.

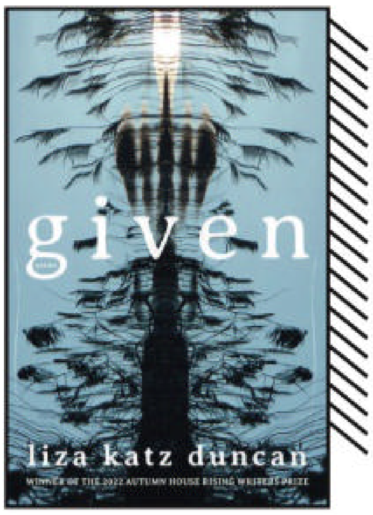
Toward the end of my visit, in the small room where hydrogen masers pump out the precise aggregate time we now live by, Sherman explained the various issues a clock can face—temperature, magnetic fields, humidity. These were technological issues with technological fixes. But, as with seemingly every aspect of the measure of time, there was a caveat. Deriving time from atoms, Sherman said, is limited by the fact that when you measure an atom, you get one bit of information—whether it is in its ground state or not. "If you have a finite number of atoms," he said, "you can only have a finite amount of knowledge about frequency." Even if we could somehow marshal all the atoms in the universe to build two clocks, "they will immediately wander off by a very small amount." All clocks drift.

"So what do you do about that?" Sherman asked, not waiting for my answer. In the end, measuring time by counting periodic processes will always have fundamental limitations. "This statistical aspect of quantum mechanics tosses one more thing in the rubbish bin, which is a conceptually perfect clock," he said. "It can't exist." ■

AUTUMN HOUSE PRESS
2023 Spring Releases

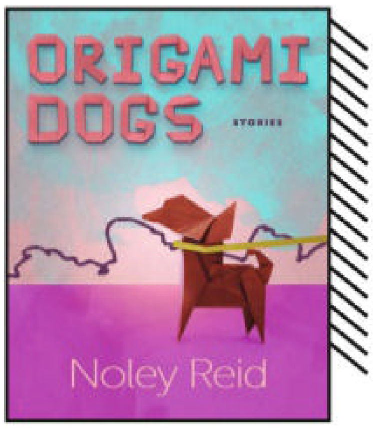


The Scorpion's Question Mark by J. D. Debris



Given by Liza Katz Duncan

ISHMAEL MASK
CHARLES KELL
Ishmael Mask by Charles Kell



Origami Dogs: Stories
by Noley Reid

Order yours today @ https://www.autumnhouse.org/books

Subscribe to *The Drift*!

"The lit mag of the moment." – *The New York Times*

"*The Drift* incarnates a bracing new sensibility, as agile and mordant as it is intrepid." – Pankaj Mishra

"I feel implicated by this but it's terrific." – Michelle Goldberg

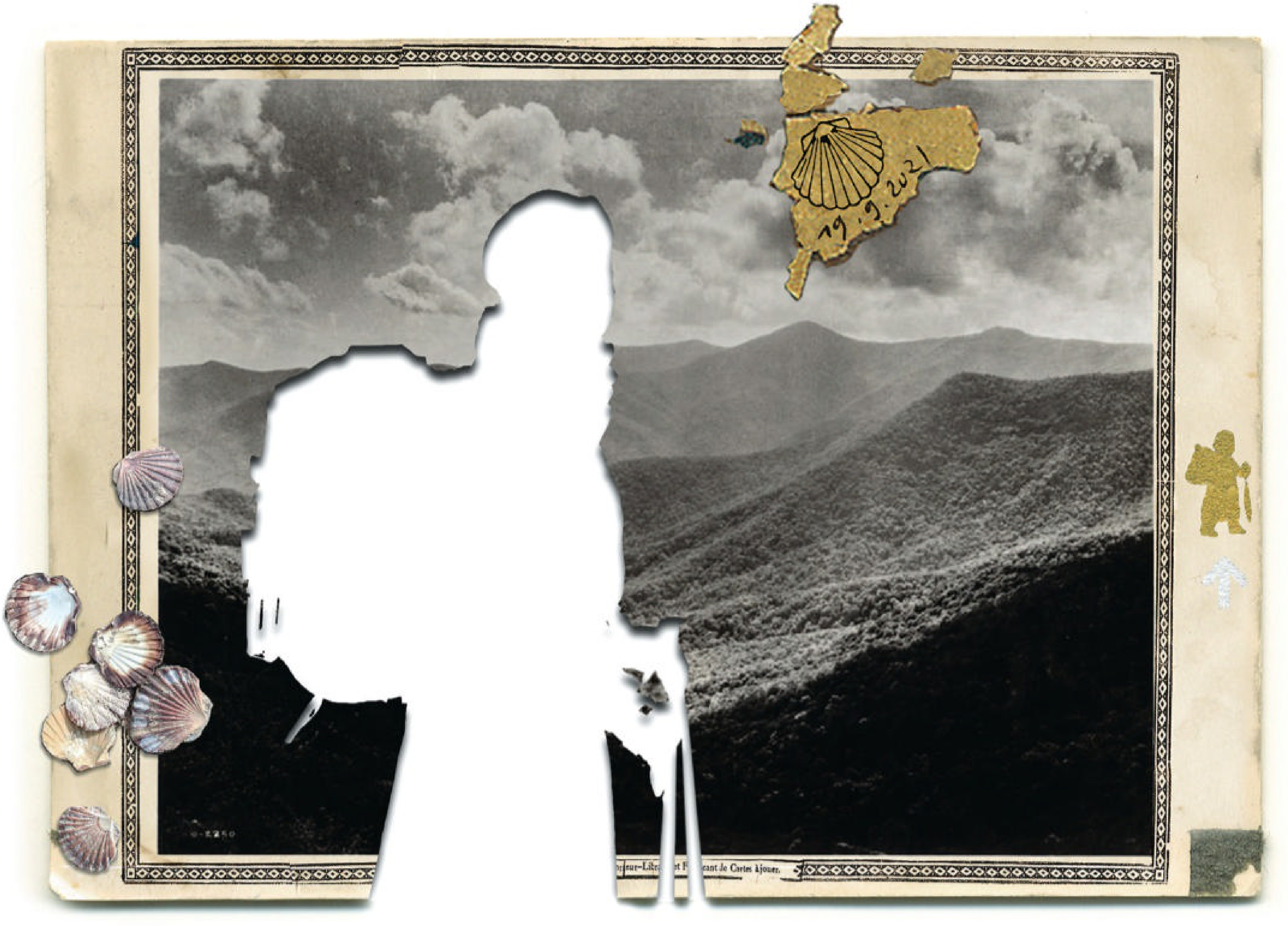
thedriftmag.com/subscribe

the drift
ISSUE FIVE | FALL 2021
the drift
ISSUE SIX | WINTER 2022
Essays on vibes, bots, dots, and the private university
Dispatches on post-MeToo feminism
Fiction by Lucie Elven, Hannah Kauders, Gabriel Smith, Missouri Williams, and James Yeh
Poetry by Lillian-Yvonne Bertram, Daniel Poppick, and Charles Rybak
the drift
ISSUE SEVEN | SUMMER 2022
Essays on Disney's planned communities, guilt, tots, and friendly workplace labor abuses
Dispatches on the state of literary fiction
An interview with Pankaj Mishra
Plus short stories, poetry, extremely abbreviated reviews, and more
the drift
ISSUE NINE | WINTER 2023
the drift
ISSUE EIGHT

NUMINOUS STRANGERS

The enduring allure of pilgrimage

By Lisa Wells



At the YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly, in the mountains outside of Asheville, North Carolina, pilgrims gathered. It was the beginning of April 2022, and in the way of that country, the days were warm and the nights were cool, and the morning fog that blanketed the valley below glowed blue. The camp conjured certain romantic and suspect associations, with its historic lodges wrapped in wide porches, their tall, white pillars smudged with the traces of a century of wear. An amalgam of cultural products signaling "the South" seemed to float in on the fog: corsets and crumbling antebellum mansions, or whatever.

Lisa Wells is the author of Believers: Making a Life at the End of the World. *Her most recent piece for* Harper's Magazine, *"To Be a Field of Poppies," appeared in the October 2021 issue.*

The occasion at hand was tradition of an altogether different phylum: The Annual Gathering of American Pilgrims on the Camino—as in the Camino de Santiago, an ancient network of paths taken by pilgrims that ends in Galicia. Hundreds of thousands of pilgrims make the journey each year, departing from various locations

Collages by Jen Renninger. Source photograph of the Black Mountains by George Masa. Courtesy Buncombe County Special Collections. All other source photographs courtesy Ann Sieben

MESON
ANTON
O CEBREIRO
21-05-07
20-5-07
OFICINA DE TURISMO
VILLAFRANCA DEL BIERZO (León)
ACOGID
PARROQUIA SANTA M
MINISTERIO

in Europe, following big yellow arrows through the north of Spain to the tomb of St. James, and some onward to the coast. The website of the American Pilgrims on the Camino says that the gathering gives Camino veterans and aspirants alike the opportunity to "share experiences" and to "learn more." But I had not come to trade intelligence on headlamps or blister care. I had come to meet the pilgrims. Really, I'd come to meet a particular pilgrim. Ann Sieben went on her first pilgrimage over fifteen years ago, and has been walking ever since. She abandoned a lucrative engineering career in nuclear remediation and gave away all her belongings, devoting herself to the life of the pilgrim.

Ann is not one to follow big yellow arrows, and she feels the Camino has largely become a "touristic" venture, in which one is nudged along a track like an "economic widget." But she is a devoted servant of her God (Catholic), and part of her God-given task on earth is to teach the world about the virtues of pilgrimage. Since her friend Christine insisted on paying for her to attend the gathering, she has decided to use this opportunity to test-drive a set of six inspirational tales from her travels in front of a sympathetic audience.

On the second night of the conference, about a dozen people had congregated near the hearth in the main lodge to hear her speak. We'd just come from a performance of a one-woman show titled "Crying on the Camino," written and performed by a retired speech pathologist. An hour and a half of bawdy jokes, musical numbers, and a recurrent direct address—"Blessed are you, pilgrim"—culminated in a tearful audience and a standing ovation. But just now, everyone looked sleepy. One silver-haired gentleman slackened in his chair, snoring.

Ann was standing before the hearth with her hands folded, monkish. She is small, just over five feet tall. Her hair is a short, white floof, buoyant as dandelion down, her eyes a blue so pale they shine like ice. She was dressed in her pilgrim best: leather walking boots, a hiking skirt, and a black, medieval-looking tunic she refers to as "the hoodie." When she's on a pilgrimage, this uniform is supplemented by a small backpack and a Day-Glo green top of some technical material. I learned that the tunic was patterned, in part, on a Lord of the Rings costume, and was "evening wear" reserved for places of rest such as monasteries, or dinner parties hosted by village mayors.

Ann introduced herself as a consecrated pilgrim who had renounced worldly possessions. "I travel with no money," she said, "which means, every night when I get to my destination … I ask people for hospitality." Throughout fifteen years, fifty-six different

Source photograph of St. Peter's Square, Vatican City © Eric Vandeville/akg-images. Source photograph of a statue of St. James, from the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela © NPL-DeA Picture Library/W. Buss/Bridgeman Images

countries, and more than forty-five thousand miles, she told us, "I have never *not* found hospitality."

Ann's talk wove together some of her greatest hits, subdivided into related "couplets." A story about two men who leveled rifles at her in the Western Desert of Egypt was paired with one about a crew of men who appeared to be narco-traffickers confronting her with machine guns while she "hoofed it" through the Chihuahuan Desert.

In the first case, Ann was walking across North Africa to Jerusalem, on a pilgrimage dedicated to "J.C. and the Boys." She was the stranger in that story, the enemy "invader of their peaceful oasis." She defused the situation by asking the men for water. By expressing an elemental need, she explains, the stranger made herself familiar.

The alleged narco-traffickers confronted her while she walked from Denver to Mexico City. "I am a pilgrim headed to Guadalupe," she told their ringleader. "My pilgrimage will either end there, at the Basilica, or in Heaven with God. For me, it's equal. You decide." In her telling, the men lowered their weapons. Some crossed themselves and wrote down prayers for their grandmothers and children, which Ann promised to deliver to "Our Lady." In this case, the men were the strangers, and their love of family taught Ann to love, in turn, "thy enemy."

Every encounter with the stranger is an opportunity to create rapport. Ann's raison d'être is building trust, because trust is the foundation of peace. Though she walks alone, pilgrimage is paradoxically a social project. "It is personal," Ann told the crowd. "But it is *not* private."

And a pilgrim never knows what gifts her needs will bestow upon her host. Take, for example, a snowy night in Romania, when an elderly peasant couple insisted that Ann sleep in their bed while they bunked with the goats. She spent the night tossing and turning with guilt. But in the morning, the couple emerged from the goathouse as flushed and giddy as naughty teenagers. The moral? "More pilgrims, more love."

Someone must have tapped the dreaming man on the shoulder. By the time Ann finished the second couplet, the whole audience had leaned in, roused by allusion to eros and automatic weapons. Later I asked how she thought it went. Did she get much feedback?

"Just all the wows," she replied. "With the silence afterwards … Spellbound. Speechless. Digesting."

I first encountered Ann in 2014. I'd had a difficult spring and felt that my life had become, as they say in twelve-step, "unmanageable." I thought it might help to take a walk. A friend who was living rough on the Rio Chama told me about a little shrine in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains that people sometimes journeyed to, hoping for a miracle.

EVERY ENCOUNTER WITH THE STRANGER IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO CREATE RAPPORT

I'm not religious and my understanding of pilgrims involved bonnets and the *Mayflower,* but I have been known to pray to indeterminate forces in my foxhole. And I suppose I do believe in a version of divine intercession, though I have no name for what intervenes (nor any evidence to support such a belief).

All the same, I sent an email to the Santuario de Chimayó requesting guidance. A few days later, I received a rigorous reply from "Ann Sieben, Pilgrim-in-Residence," detailing seasonal considerations, varieties of terrain, gear requirements, and optimal points of departure. One route began, aptly, in a town called Purgatory.

I clicked a link to a Blogspot embedded in her email signature and spent some hours reading her "Winter Pilgrim" archive of adventures. Some entries detailed touching encounters with "the people of the world." Others railed against the hypocrisy of stingy priests and nuns. Each resolved in the neat moral didacticism of an Aesopian fable. "People are good" was one of her most frequent conclusions, along with, "The world needs more pilgrims."

While I doubted that I would sow world peace by walking, I did hope to disarm the warring factions within me. Maybe that's why I detected an alluring subtext in Ann's fables on the psycho-biological, necromantic power of subjecting oneself to pilgrimage. The pilgrim externalizes a dilemma—projecting divine resolution upon the shrine or sacred relic she journeys toward—then she works through that dilemma, step by literal step, all the while getting juiced on endorphins. Though the wanderer may not be "lost," her narrative lacks a satisfying structure. Having a destination anchors the pilgrim's journey, providing a fixed point that both mitigates the anxiety of the unknown and, ideally, delivers catharsis on arrival.

Structure appealed to me. Up to that point, I'd lived much of my life wandering without a tether. Typically, that meant taking a dead-end food-service job, accumulating a thousand bucks—then quitting, breaking up with whoever, stuffing my meager belongings into a backpack, and skipping town. I wandered all over and had my share of fun and dicey adventures, and took my licks with reasonable courage: parasites in Guatemala, dysentery in Myanmar, menacing dudes on the cross-country Greyhound. People frequently warned me that it couldn't last, that eventually I would be made to pay for my freedom, and at terrible cost. Most likely I'd pay with my ass, though possibly with my life. At the very least I would one day crave stability, and then I would finally understand that I was not, in fact, free to do whatever I wanted. Not at all.

This part of the prophecy came true. As touring musicians, backpackers, Casanovas, and other itinerants will tell you: eventually you dream of collecting cookware, or developing an exercise practice, or raincoat-free coitus uninhibited by the threat of STDs. In this imagined life, you will host dinner parties for friends who don't leave town in the morning. You will paint your walls a friendly color and hang on them your travel-gathered treasures. For my part, I imagined a child toddling at my feet while I baked goods and prepared whatever it is you prepare in Ball jars.

I hoped Ann Sieben would guide me out of Purgatory, but alas, our schedules did not align, and she soon vanished into her next adventure. Her blog posts petered out, then stopped altogether. Years passed.

Eventually, I cleaned up my act, moved, married, gave birth. It was the spring of 2020, so I held the baby up to the window while his relatives stood on the porch waving through the glass. I helped him learn to crawl, then walk, in the same square footage we'd been stewing in, day after rigidly structured day. (Feed, play, bathe, diaper, rock to sleep, repeat.) It was as total and protracted a confinement as I'd ever experienced, save perhaps for my own immobilized infancy. Like everyone else, I idled in the purgatory between onset and ending.

I had presumed, at the age of thirty-seven—the age, incidentally, at which my father was made a grandfather by my teenage sister—that I had fucked off more than enough to fulfill my lifetime's freedom quota. I was either ready to trade it in for stability and security or I would never be. I purchased a rolling pin, and used it to make an apple pie that my real-life toddler grasped after, repeating his grunt that means "I want." Thanks to that child—who is desire embodied, grunting after whatever *objet petit a* dangles beyond his reach—I saw into a mirror. And from its double vision came a painful clarity: there is no such thing as "enough" freedom. There will never be enough. You do not get used to not having it. You can make no lasting accommodation for its absence.

I began to wonder about the pilgrim again. Was she still out there, walking somewhere? And if so, could I join her?

As I've learned from Ann, pilgrims are not especially uncommon, but you'd be hard-pressed to find another like her. To wit: some pilgrims visit shrines by bus, and Ann calls these "bus pilgrims." The conference attendees were for the most part "walking pilgrims," though some will sleep in nice inns and pay to have their luggage portered, and these are known as "posh pilgrims." "Touristic pilgrims" is a general category that covers all those who use money to grease the skids of their travel, believing that they are entitled to whatever they pay for. The "penitent pilgrim" may wear a shirt of hair, or crawl for miles on his hands and knees, or shoulder a heavy cross, or flagellate himself as he walks, whipping away his sins as steadily as the horse's tail disperses flies. Ann is a "mendicant pilgrim," a designation for those who walk with few worldly possessions, surviving on charity alone. In my view, the mendicant pilgrim is the most hardcore. Penance, by definition, is payable and therefore finite. Soreness subsides in time. Scraped-up hands and knees scab over, lacerations mend, and shirts may be removed. But Ann's austerity is never-ending.

In general, mendicancy means *begging*, surviving by asking alms. The early Franciscans lived as wandering street preachers and were allowed to work or beg for food, but were not permitted to accept money in any amount, even as alms. But as Ann explains it, the Franciscan reason for being, their charism, is *to love*. The Dominican charism is *to teach*. The Jesuit charism is *to learn*. "St. Ignatius was a pilgrim," she said, "St. Dominic was a pilgrim, St. Francis was a pilgrim—but that was a transitory situation until they transformed and figured out their charism. For me, the pilgrimage *is* the charism." Because there was no official designation in the Church for what Ann was doing, and because she didn't want to "feel like some whack-a-doodle out there walking," she worked with the judicial vicar of the Archdiocese of Denver to found the Society of Servant Pilgrims under canon laws 731 and 298, the latter of which relates to "associations of the Christian faithful."

Papist bookkeeping aside, in practice, Ann's life works like this: she hitches a ride to a point of origin, or someone donates a plane or a bus ticket, then she walks. She prefers winter but has walked in all seasons, in all kinds of weather, and over all sorts of terrain, averaging twenty-six miles a day when walking alone. At the end of each day, she arrives at a farmhouse, or a hut, or a village square, or a monastery, or a general store, and throws herself at the mercy of whoever answers the (sometimes proverbial) door. She has been offered shelter by the very wealthy and the very poor. She has slept on church pews, in a crypt, in mansions, and in a henhouse. She has been turned away by Benedictine priests avowed to greet each stranger as if Christ Himself. And she's been taken in by a great number of poor people living in tiny shacks. While it may be technically true that she has "never *not* found hospitality," neither did she enter every shelter willingly. For example, after she crossed into Panama illegally from Colombia via the Darién Gap, she was passed through a series of military encampments in the jungle, then spent eleven nights in a Panama City detention center. She once slept in an unmarked van as it sped through a conflict zone to the Egyptian border. (This was under orders from both the U.S. Embassy and the transitional Libyan government. She would have strongly preferred to walk.)

I found Ann again in May 2021. We would meet once a week over Zoom, where she would fill me in on her life. The pandemic had interrupted her most recent pilgrimage, in early 2020, in South Dakota to honor Nicholas Black Elk. She passed four months in "hermitage," moving into a sparsely furnished cave in the mountains of New Mexico. Every evening, she would heat stones on her wood-burning stove, then tuck them into her bedding for warmth. Once a week she hiked a mile to a friend's house to fill up jugs with water, and would haul them back in her knapsack over several trips. One night soon after she arrived, a wicked storm blew through and flooded the cave. It sounded pretty much biblical. She scrambled to rescue her notebooks from the water, but some pages bled. Even so, she said, life in the cave was "a lot of fun!"

By the time we started talking, she was staying with her friend Eileen in Denver, where she eagerly awaited her return to pilgrim life: the first of five eighty-eight-day walks dedicated to St. Martin, slated to begin in France

Society of Servant Pilgrims
Paroisse St-Jacques
50240 St-James
18 09 2021

that August. Eileen had helped Ann design and sew her many custom garments over the years, including the hiking skirt, the hoodie, and a pair of bespoke wool gaiters. Now they were at work on an anorak to keep Ann dry during the journey.

I was impressed by her ingenuity—by the cave and the custom gear—and told her so.

"I assessed the resources," she said breezily. With "duct tape and a sledgehammer, I can do a lot."

"Ann," I said, "you're like MacGyver."

This confused her. "Is that a television program?"

As spring gave way to summer, I began to plan an "assignment" that would justify taking leave of my domestic cloister. Ann was reluctant to participate at first. "On the one hand, a silent pilgrim does the world no good," she told me early on. "However, I also feel strongly that *who I am* is unimportant. What I *do* has to be radiated, but *who* I am isn't the thing of it."

I asked her what "the thing of it" might be.

"Shrouding myself in the shadow of my insignificance in order to arrive wherever the holy spirit directs me—is kind of the thing of it."

The abrupt appearance and disappearance of the mendicant pilgrim is part of her power. She emerges from a dense wood, in the dark of night, in a snowstorm; or she appears on the horizon in a remote desert; or she's on your doorstep, with her white hair and glacial eyes, asking for water. Because the experience is singular, it is preserved in the memories of those she meets, never to be dissipated by quotidian updates. Anonymity allows her to become an archetype. The archetype burns in the mind, numinous, and the encounter goes on unfolding after she leaves. That was the hope, anyway.

A pilgrimage begins in the heart, Ann says. You must first desire to make a sacred journey, then you must commit to your destination, "because it's gonna get tough. You have to need to get there." Cultivating an "openness to uncertainty" is the third component. A pilgrimage can't be planned to the minute; you have to get out of the way and make room for divine intercession.

I desired to make a sacred journey. But I didn't have a destination in mind, and I was having trouble getting my head around the childcare component. Ann was planning to guide a group along the Danube soon, and at first this seemed like a decent possibility. But it wasn't long before I realized that the cost of the trip—both in terms of cash and in time away from my toddler—made it impossible.

When I mentioned my concerns, Ann said, "He's welcome along. I would think a stroller would be not inappropriate. We're not on hiking trails, we're on wheelable surfaces."

For a moment, I indulged a vision of me and my son strolling along the riverbank, lunching on baguette and cheese—before I flashed on the last "vacation" we attempted as a family,

Source photographs courtesy Ann Sieben and Lisa Wells

a short trip to the Oregon coast where it poured rain for three days. Because I am an amateur, and did not so much as scan the rental listing for the phrase "child friendly," we spent those housebound hours body blocking the toddler as he lunged at precious shells, pottery, and glassware displayed on low shelves while gleefully screaming, "I want danger!"

Scapegoating one's child is a parent's favorite pastime. But even if my kid were a placid companion, walking with a group of retirees along a well-trodden path was not the transformative passage I had in mind. I wanted a pilgrimage as defined by the *Century Dictionary and Cyclopedia*: "A traveling on through a strange country … [to] obtain some spiritual or miraculous benefit." At first glance, the miracle might seem to be the objective. But it's the dislocation from the known, the *traveling on through* that strange terrain beyond the numbing repetition and habits of ordinary life that catalyzes transformation.

In my daydreams, I became the numinous stranger. A highway specter upon whom no one's well-being depended. Alone in the hands of the Gods, open to divine intercession, crossing paths with the Other for a moment of brief intensity before moving on. Like most fantasies, mine were not fashioned from pure imagination, but from scraps of formative experience—a version of my dissolute youth, its considerable physical discomforts and mental angst edited out. At first, I'd been drawn to Ann's discipline and purpose. Now, suffocated by purpose, I coveted her freedom—in both cases making her an avatar of the inaccessible. I longed for the kind of unmitigated connection to metaphysical forces that a life like hers made possible. Beyond freedom of movement, Ann possessed an existential freedom afforded not just by her faith, but by fearlessness in the face of death. (In fact, she once told me that she *hoped* to be martyred. Apparently, martyrs need proof of only one miracle, not two, to become saints.)

At present, I did not have freedom of movement or of mind. One of the strangest experiences of becoming someone's mother is that I have never cared so little about my own life, and at the same time, I have never been so afraid to die. Daily, I fantasize about stepping into the path of an active shooter, of using my body as a barricade between my child and a texting driver. Keeping myself alive is of paramount importance, but only in order to serve the single function of keeping him alive. I had to ask myself, what was this all about? Was I hoping to be transformed by an unscripted journey, or was I fleeing my responsibilities? Because the former was not achievable without accepting certain risks. You might even say the risks of such a journey are inextricable from its rewards.

Ann was no help on this front. She has little patience for the handwringing of those denizens of a fear-based reality. Courage comes through doing, not fretting. People are constantly asking her, *Aren't you afraid?* After an encounter with a particularly concerned Kansan couple, Ann wrote, "My standard answer, fully from the heart, is that fear and experience seem to me to occupy the same place in the soul. The more experience one has, the less room there is for fear; yet in the absence of experience—even borrowed experience—fear expands to fill the void. It can become paralyzing."

If experience is the source of Ann's fearlessness, it is an experience that she cultivated over the course of her life. She was born in 1963 on the Jersey shore, the middle of five children. Her mother was a librarian, her father a professor of English. She describes her family as "somewhat competitive." When the siblings played Scrabble, they competed for seven-letter words. On Sundays, they filled out the *New York Times* crossword "with a pen," she said, "because what kind of loser uses a pencil?"

Though her family was Irish Catholic, Ann cites two secular sources when asked what might have predicted her future as a mendicant pilgrim. On summer breaks, her father conscripted his children in renovating and flipping houses. If the children needed to learn how to repair something, they cracked open a book. The other decisive influence came through membership in the High Adventure Explorer Scouts, a co-ed program run by the Boy Scouts specializing in rugged backcountry trips, wherein she attained skills like orienteering, snow camping, and mountaineering. A life motto began to emerge: *Just figure it out.*

After high school, an interest in geology drew her out West. She moved to Denver to attend the Colorado School of Mines, where she studied geological engineering. In the late Eighties, she entered the nascent field of nuclear and radioactive remediation, eventually running maintenance and clean-up crews at weapons depots and nuclear power plants, figuring it out as she went along. By her early forties, she had "ticked all her boxes." She was living in Europe, stacking coin and driving a company Jag—but something was missing.

Like many pilgrims, Ann was introduced to pilgrim life by walking a leg of the Camino. A few weeks later, she walked the Via Francigena from Canterbury to Rome—less a proper route than a list of towns from the itinerary of a tenth-century archbishop named Sigeric—which she considers her first pilgrimage. Ann started from the cathedral in Canterbury on December 17, 2007, with plans to arrive in Rome for Easter. That meant walking over the Alps in the middle of winter. She had Sigeric's list and plotted the rest as she went along using "excellent 1:100,000 scale maps" purchased from local bookstores. "Few women had walked it alone, if any at that time," she later wrote, and people were "generally aghast, often to the point of scolding me like a child for my obvious unawareness—so they thought—of the inherent dangers of a woman alone and in winter."

She began to learn the ropes of mendicancy, resting her feet in churches and reading up on the lives of the saints. She quickly figured out that "candles in an enclosed chapel put out noticeable and cherished heat." In France, village mayors often held keys to designated pilgrim accommodations. "As a matter of pride, the towns have to host credentialed pilgrims—at least a lone woman in winter." The accommodation could be a room in a community center or a cabin in the forest. These little towns had been in the business of hosting pilgrims for centuries. "Always bunkbeds, a shower, an equipped kitchen with a stocked cupboard—pasta, soup, cans of tuna, coffee, tea … Who knew?"

Having made it to Santiago and Rome, Ann hoped to complete her personal trifecta and walk to Jerusalem. She looked for accounts from others who'd made the trip and learned that most had traveled around the Mediterranean—through Turkey, Syria, and Lebanon—and used boats. "Not even St. Francis or St. Ignatius had actually made it by foot," she wrote. "They hadn't attempted it, it seems."

For Ann, the potential to become the first in history to blaze a path only sweetened the deal. But there were travel restrictions in the region that would have made it nearly impossible for an American to complete the trek on foot—legally, at least. It seemed likely that she'd have to sneak across borders, and though Ann does not always defer to the authorities, she does tend to observe their laws. It wasn't the right time to complete the trifecta, but neither was she ready to return to her old life. Uncertain about where to go next, Ann did what she always did when she reached a crossroads: she assessed her resources and consulted the literature.

According to various Christian texts, when Jesus told the apostles to go to the ends of the earth and spread the Gospel, James apparently took this instruction literally and went to Galicia, to the coast where the known world collapsed into the sea at Cape Finisterre (from the Latin *finis terrae*: "the end of the earth"). And so we have the Camino de Santiago, or "the way of St. James." Meanwhile, Peter went to Rome, where he was crucified, the story goes, upside down at his own request. Thomas, Jude, and Simon went to Persia. John to Anatolia. But Andrew? Andrew went to Scythia, traveling through what is now Russia, Romania, and Ukraine. He might have journeyed for months or decades, no one knows for sure, but it's believed that he eventually wound up in Patras, Greece.

"Well, *there's* a guy!" Ann thought. "Brother Peter goes to the largest city of the Roman empire," and Andrew goes on an adventure. It was a badass move, and thus appealed to her.

She would mount a pilgrimage in honor of St. Andrew, she decided, beginning in Kyiv and ending in Patras. Sure, there would be challenges. For example, she didn't speak Ukrainian or Russian, or Romanian, or Bulgarian, or Turkish, or Greek. Five languages, five countries, five months.

Ann returned to Denver to prepare, reaching out to the local Ukrainian Catholic Church, the Greek Orthodox Metropolis, and to a Turkish group at the Colorado Muslim Society, in search of language partners. The Ukrainian priest and his elderly parishioners were particularly helpful, eager to put Ann in touch with relatives back home. He prepared a letter of introduction, written in Ukrainian. A reverend at the Greek Orthodox Metropolis was less helpful, according to Ann. He refused to provide a letter, warning that she'd be received as a heretic, "raped, robbed, or worse," and adding that if, by some miracle, she made it out of Romania alive, she would undoubtedly be trafficked in Turkey.

This man did not frighten Ann, but he did annoy her. "St. Andrew no doubt faced the same challenges and then some," she wrote, cheerfully. "It's amazing how much confidence can come from other people's experiences, even if separated by 2,000 years. He did it; I can do it."

Ann bought a journal with accordion paper, decorated the cover with an image of the medieval pilgrim medallion, then coated it in boot wax. She cut another medallion from a tin can, punched a hole through it, and strung it on a ribbon to be worn around her neck. She tucked away twenty dollars to purchase a visa at the Turkish border and bought a one-way plane ticket to Kyiv. It had been two years since she'd earned a paycheck and she was nearly out of money.

On Monday, November 16, 2009, Ann walked out of Kyiv and into the countryside. She'd acquired a Russian military map that showed a

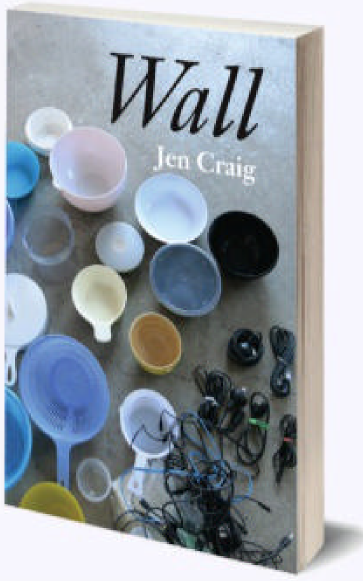
Wall

Jen Craig

"Every new novel by Jen Craig is cause for celebration. They are a reminder that literature is still being written in the English language. In *Wall*, her brilliant third novel, Jen Craig deepens her proliferative style of self-examination."

Mauro Javier Cárdenas

ZEROGRAM PRESS



A woman returns to Australia to clear out her father's house, with an eye to transforming the contents into an art installation in the tradition of the revered Chinese artist Song Dong.

ZEROGRAMPRESS.COM

Roman Catholic monastery within a day's walk. Every so often, she would ask for help from one of the many people foraging for mushrooms along the path, and they would point the way, though she came to realize that they'd been directing her to a Russian Orthodox monastery—not the Catholic one. It was too late to change course. The pivotal moment had arrived. Would she be denounced as a heretic?

Ann would later credit the events of that day with severing an "invisible tether." The Orthodox monks welcomed her warmly, as did the majority of people she met over the next five months. The families who took her in were mostly very poor, sleeping together on the floor under common blankets for warmth. It was extremely cold, and as she tells it, these families sometimes directed her to "sleep next to Grandmother, she's very fat and will keep you warm all night!" She slept with many people's grandmothers.

"I understood firsthand everyone has something to give," she reflected, "even something as fundamental as body heat, and everybody cherishes the opportunity to give to those less fortunate. In my case, I was seen as having the genuine and grave misfortune of insufficient body fat to endure subfreezing temperatures."

Her homemade pilgrim credential wound up serving her well. Hosts wrote the date, their names, and their towns in her book. Often, they'd include encouraging messages that would be read by her hosts down the road. Adults and children alike were fascinated by the "various languages and symbols." One priest would recognize the name of another and accept her more readily.

In a sense, Ann was learning to engineer her own vulnerability. By laying herself open to lethal temperatures, to unknown landscapes and languages, she occasioned the goodness of others. And the people she met were good, she maintained. "I saw this, because I put myself in the situation to see it."

Contrary to the warning from the reverend, she was not raped or robbed. And after 137 days and 2,748 miles, Ann finally arrived at the Cathedral of St. Andrew. "With the first step out of Kyiv, I became a pilgrim of faith," she later wrote. "Anywhere I faced was my future."

Pilgrimage is not inherently moral. It may be undertaken in good or bad faith, or with no faith at all. That said, certain motivations recur. Pilgrims have always walked in the hopes of being delivered; whether from evil or illness, from a guilty conscience, from the pain of loss, or the pain of paled belief. And there have always been those who used pilgrimage as a pretense to throw off obligations: debt, bad marriages, the burden of children. In the Middle Ages, opportunists on the Camino de Santiago disguised themselves as pilgrims and set about freely sowing oats, or robbing other pilgrims on the road. Then as now, their hosts could never be sure who walked in earnest and who in bad faith. In 1600, this prompted a vigorous condemnation from a subprior in Roncesvalles:

> To cover up their wicked lives they toss on a traveler's tunic and a shoulder cape, sling a messenger bag to one side, a gourd canteen on the other, staff in hand and a floozie for a fake wife, swarming all over Spain on their endless cycle of "pilgrimages."

But ulterior motives were not always so cynical. For serfs who walked the Camino in the Middle Ages, the perilous journey was often their single opportunity to escape a pattern of cradle-to-grave labor, to encounter the world, to touch the mountains and the sea—ecstatic experiences in their own right. Any freedom afforded by the journey came at the risk of mortal danger. Wolves, wild dogs, bears, and robbers haunted the way, which was already shadowed by the swords of plague, exposure, thirst, and starvation. Many did not survive the trip.

Like her forebears, Ann has navigated her share of hazards: savage dogs in the Greek countryside, crocodiles in Chiapas, a tornado in Kansas, vampire bats in Peru. When she was finally able to begin her walk to Jerusalem in 2011—thanks to a brief window of border fluidity opened by the Arab Spring—nearly every country she passed through was experiencing some level of conflict. But if you're betting on pilgrim mortality, smart money is on the workaday risks: infection, illness, dehydration, getting hit by a car, slipping on some rocks in a moment of lapsed vigilance. Ann's policy is to eat whatever her hosts eat (except for pickles!) and to drink whatever they drink, no matter where she is in the world. This has included boiled swamp water, and much meat of questionable age and derivation. She once sipped a bottle of tainted water in Morocco and for the next three days pissed "jet-black pee." When I asked if she'd picked up any parasites, she said that she'd rather not know. "I'm sure there's a lot of zoology that's not standard for a Denverite, but we're in harmony," she said, patting her abdomen. "I worked in nuclear. That was kind of our thing. On a need-to-know basis . . . Why start worrying, *oh I'm carrying some parasite that might come bursting through the soles of my feet one day*. I'll deal with that when it happens."

The truest believer eschews all parachutes. If you consult the Society of Servant Pilgrims' website—Ann is both its founder and its only dedicated member—you'll learn that this extends to money, because money burdens the pilgrim with "the need to protect it" and prevents engagement with those she'd otherwise seek out for alms. Moreover, if someone is tempted to steal from you, "the sin is owned by the pilgrim" and "sorrows await he who does the tempting." As for cameras: "a photo only captures a distorted visual snapshot of a moment, not the full sensory experience—the scents, the sounds, the feels . . . the animations."

Despite these objections, COVID-19 contact-tracing requirements in Europe forced Ann to carry a smartphone on her first walk for St. Martin. She wasn't thrilled, but decided to use the obstacle as an opportunity to log her daily pursuit of food and shelter. Over the late summer and fall, I received photographs and updates from her "two-thumbs journal." My own days remained monotonous and confined, and I devoured her descriptions of meals made sweeter by travail: windfall fruit gleaned from the orchards she passed through, day-old baguettes and gifted hunks of cheese, all of it washed down with a bottle of donated table wine. I wandered vicariously through ancient cathedrals and verdant countryside, reveling in her snapshots of *the animations* and *the feels*, and my torture was bittersweet.

Ann told the story of St. Martin to everyone she met: a soldier who once sheared his cloak in half with a sword to share with a beggar. Meanwhile, in Seattle, where I live, it was a summer of wildfire smoke and a lethal heat dome, and charity for the ever-increasing number of people who camped in tents and vans lining the streets was scarce. I was raw from lack of sleep. From caring for a vulnerable child in a terrifying world. I felt alternately bereft and enraged whenever Ann was rejected by an unfeeling priest or a condescending town official. And I joined in her celebration when her day was ultimately saved by a kind Samaritan.

I was still hatching plans for my own pilgrimage, but a destination continued to elude me. It would be too tedious to elaborate my brainstorming, but I will confess that one idea involved the childhood home of Jimi Hendrix, and another entailed several days of walking down a busy highway shoulder. Destinations on the short list were selected for ease of execution and had little personal relevance, because anywhere truly meaningful demanded either too much time away from home or too many potential hazards. In my life before, I had taken it for granted that mortal danger was the price of my freedom. But my world had changed. I had changed. How could I complete a pilgrimage if the moment I part from my child it's as though I draw a length of retractable leash? From that moment, no matter where I go—whether on a morning run, or deep into the Appalachian foothills—its tension pulls me inexorably home. For the sake of expedience, we can call this tether "love." But I would not characterize the experience as pleasant. More like tearing a vital organ from your body,

World's Finest Eye Cream

a "selections" product in Oprah magazine

20% Off

AIRBRUSH

Eye Refining Treatment

Airbrush Eye Cream reduces puffiness right away, ***especially when cold.*** Promotes new collagen which reduces fine lines and wrinkles. Reduces dark circles, is soothing, hydrating and promotes a youthful healthy glow! Hypo-allergenic and natural containing emu oil serum, green tea extract, aloe vera, collagen and elastin. Use am & pm for best results and the jar will last about 3 months!

Compare to:
La Mer Eye Balm @ $200
Shiseido Solution LX @ $130
La Prairie Swiss @ $240

Reg $68
Now only $54.40

Use 20% discount code: HARP78 at www.dremu.com
or call **800-542-0026**
Free Shipping – Open 24/7

SOLUTION TO THE MARCH PUZZLE

"My **choices** in **life** were **either** to be a **piano player** in a **whorehouse** or a **politician**, and to **tell** the **truth**, there's **hardly** any **difference**."
—Harry Truman

NOTES FOR "TRUE WORDS":

*Note: * indicates an anagram.*

■	P	I	A	N	O	P	L	A	Y	E	R	■
W	O	M	B	S	B	O	B	D	A	R	E	D
H	O	R	S	E	L	L	B	I	K	I	N	I
O	R	E	C	H	O	I	C	E	S	C	A	F
R	E	B	O	U	Q	T	R	U	T	H	M	F
E	L	A	N	G	U	I	S	H	E	P	E	E
H	A	R	D	L	Y	C	R	U	L	L	E	R
O	P	R	E	S	S	I	N	G	L	I	F	E
U	S	A	I	N	T	A	R	E	B	E	A	N
S	E	C	T	I	O	N	A	L	H	S	L	C
E	M	U	H	P	R	U	R	I	E	N	C	E
R	E	D	E	E	M	S	E	E	L	P	O	T
■	H	A	R	R	Y	T	R	U	M	A	N	■

ACROSS: 10. womb[at]s; 11. two mngs.; 12. *; 14. *; 15. bi-kin-1; 16. two mngs.; 19. pun, calf; 20. re-b; 25. l-anguish; 27. [t]epee; 30. cru[E]ller; 31. two mngs.; 37. U.S.A.-in; 39. two mngs.; 40. *; 43. [l]emu[r]; 45. pru(rienc*)e*; 46. re-deems; 47. *.

DOWN: 1. [sham]poo-r[azor]; 2. *; 3. *; 4. first letters; 6. ad-i.e.-U; 7. two mngs.; 8. e[very]-rich; 9. *; 18. *; 21. **; 22. bar(rac-U, rev.)d-a; 26. hug-e; 28. two mngs.; 33. rep-ins, rev.; 34. st-or-My!; 36. falco*-n; 38. R-are-R; 41. homophone; 42. hidden; 44. he[l]m, rev.

then anxiously trailing it into a hail of shrapnel. And I had engineered this vulnerability.

Though I could probably get away with one of the shorter and nearer routes, I did not want to walk down a highway shoulder for several days. I wanted the fantasy, to have it both ways. To stay close and care for my boy, and simultaneously to live free of all expectations and attachments. An unoriginal predicament, to be so divided. Perhaps this accounts for the saints' trick of bilocation.

I could, I did not want, I wanted—sometimes we hear ourselves talking. What a sad parody of the spiritual-not-religious set, spooning a little of this and that tradition onto my tray at the discount buffet of metaphysical eclecticism! Emphasis inevitably on the *I*. Here was yet another way I differed from Ann. Those of us who journeyed in the hope of some personally relevant intervention or message were mainly in it for ourselves, in order to encounter or to beseech the divine, not to serve it. Ann walked in service of her God, with saints for co-workers, on behalf of the whole world. Like the parable of the drowning man who refuses human rescue in anticipation of divine intervention, I kept waiting for an inspired destination—some supernatural epiphany that would reconcile me to my life. All the while, the example of Ann's steady, boots-on-the-ground devotion was staring me in the face.

Like most human endeavors, pilgrimage depends on fantasy and projection. Projection of the mercy and power of God upon the object; the fantasy of deliverance upon arrival. Like the shoestring travel guide, with its images of mountain trekkers and seaside cliffs at sunset, pilgrimage suggests rewards that will outlive the adventure or pleasure of the moment. We hope the journey will manifest inwardly, deepen and change us. Sometimes it does. And sometimes it distracts us from the depths of where we already are.

My fantasy of becoming someone else through travel was born long before my son. As was the revelation that no matter where I put my body, there would be no escaping myself. Hadn't I come to the same conclusion dozens of times? That even paradise can become burdensome if you're inclined to experience consciousness that way—even if you're free to blunt that consciousness with drugs, adrenaline, or the seduction cycle's cascade of dopamine and norepinephrine. Isn't that why, for two decades, I couldn't stop moving? Psychoanalysts call this tendency the "manic defense," an attempt to distract oneself from uncomfortable feelings with frenzied activity. As I see it, the main difference between my manically defended former life and my situation today is that I no longer live in the shadow of my own insignificance. I've become significant to others, and this significance demands that I retire my expired distraction strategies.

I don't mean that my former itinerancy was exclusively an attempt to outrun discomfort—I also widened my horizons, encountered many lovely Others, touched the mountains and the sea, and in so doing experienced flashes of ecstatic communion. I only mean that at some imperceptible juncture, my choices became compulsions, and what had once felt enlivening came to feel like going through the motions. Parenthood, I am learning, likewise depends on fantasy and projection. And from the inevitable erosion of those projections, the dashing of those fantasies, comes both pain and the possibility of growth. Put another way, my son has not deprived me of my freedom so much as he has dispelled the illusion that I was ever free to begin with.

There's a story Ann likes to tell about a shepherd boy she encountered one day in the Extremadura region of Spain. She crested a lonely hill and came upon the boy and his flock. He was about twelve years old, all alone, cradling a sickly lamb in his lap with "obvious sadness." Ann offered to share some bread and oranges. He pulled a hunk of sheep's cheese from his rucksack and together they ate.

She presents this as an example of how her fleeting presence can provide companionship and comfort. "So many times, somebody needs an objective sounding board and *bam,* I show up out of nowhere, and *bam,* I leave." She is the deus ex machina who, passing through, facilitates peace, or love, or else poses a dilemma for the one who answers the door: *Will I open my heart to this stranger or turn them away?*

Of the shepherd boy, she continued, "Oddly, he never asked about me, where I was going . . . He didn't inquire about my nationality. He only told me about his sheep, the lambs born in the previous weeks, pointing to the ones he personally helped deliver. He told me the names of some of the ewes and how long he's known them. Somehow he could distinguish one sheep from another. They all looked alike to me. This boy knew his flock, and it seemed the flock knew the shepherd by the sound of his voice."

On the one hand, Ann makes herself vulnerable in order to help others discover their own generosity. But it doesn't seem to occur to her that these numinous strangers might have appeared out of nowhere in order to facilitate *her* growth, to remind her of *her* goodness, to supply *her* with companionship and comfort. Or that there might be more to the story of a shepherd, who knows each of his flock by name; who delivers, and loves, and grieves each one.

Or maybe she does sense this, and doesn't want to say. As Ann sometimes reminds me, she's not "a touchy-feely kind of person."

Pilgrimage is a runaway metaphor, and I know I've headed down a shady path. But I can't help feeling that where I already am, for once, is the only meaningful destination left to me—or at least, the only one I can pursue in good faith. Or that there might be more to the story of the boy, whose vulnerability and need transforms his host. That my charism, for now, is *to caretake.* Much is made of the parent's selflessness in this dynamic, but my experience has been otherwise. Becoming a parent has meant tolerating an uncomfortable surplus of myself. Every time I try to flee, my child bars the way, forcing me inward. A strange and uncertain country, indeed. ■

ORDER TODAY AT STORE.HARPERS.ORG

RULES OF THE GAME
THE BEST SPORTS WRITING
FROM HARPER'S MAGAZINE

"One helluva team of writers has produced a book you'll be dipping into for years."
–Jim Bouton, author of *Ball Four*

Rules of the Game: The Best Sports Writing from Harper's Magazine uncovers funny, touching, exciting, and intriguing stories of the sporting life, both professional and amateur. This collection includes some of the most well-known and respected writers of the past century, including **Mark Twain, Tom Wolfe, Shirley Jackson, Lewis H. Lapham, Gary Cartwright, A. Bartlett Giamatti, Pete Axthelm, George Plimpton,** and **Rich Cohen.**

EDITED BY MATTHEW STEVENSON
AND MICHAEL MARTIN

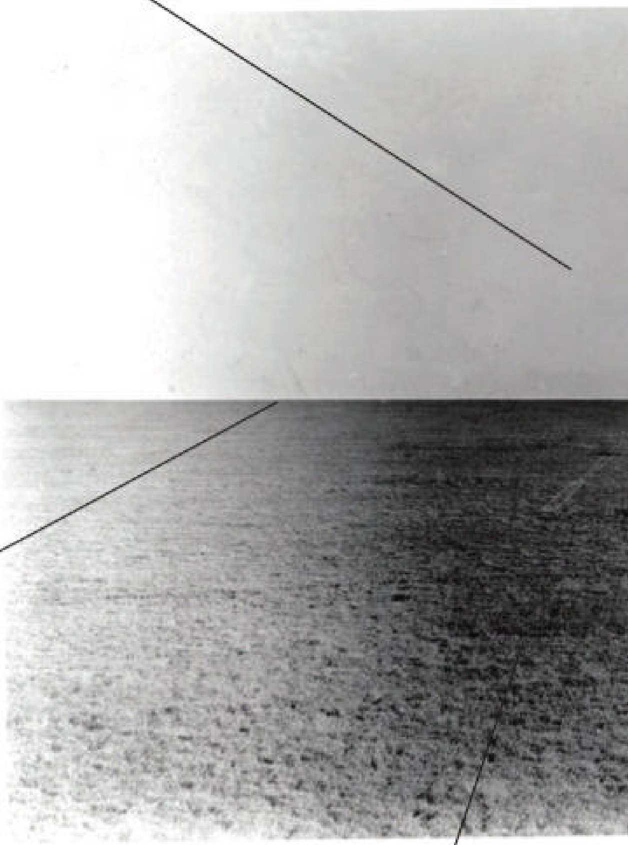
FRANKLIN
SQUARE
PRESS
FSP

LONE ON

Prairie madness

By Lela

In the spring of 1885, a young woman named Etta Crowder and her mother planted sunflowers along the edge of their allotted Homestead property 160 miles northwest of Des Moines. Etta's mother wanted to "shut off the view." When they'd first arrived, in 1869, "standing alone in the midst of those endless miles of prairie," Etta wrote in her memoirs, her mother was sure that they "had nearly reached the end of the world." Hundreds of miles south, near Mound City, Kansas, just a few years before, Adela Orpen had found her grandmother staring out the window, weeping. "The horrible truth," Orpen recounted, was that she cried because "there was nothing beautiful to look at." Adela described their house: "as if a block of white wood had appeared on the top of an Atlantic roller." The prairie, which had been the floor of an ancient sea for sixty million years, was often compared to the ocean. This photo, taken in 1897 and published in the U.S. Geological Survey, shows a home like Adela's, in Haskell County, Kansas, made miniature amid the flat miles.



The boundless field of grass, the unmarked horizon in all directions, was a sight that thousands of settlers would meet with similar disquiet during the westward expansion of the late nineteenth century. The Homestead Act, passed in 1862, allowed settlers to claim plots for low fees, provided that they establish farms and remain in place for a minimum of five years. The parcels were as large as 160 acres—a quarter mile—and neighbors were usually several miles apart. Thanks to the efforts of nationalist romantics and expansionists, by the time of the act the Great Plains were often called the prairie and described as a garden. But they had previously been known as the Great American Desert. And the prairie's new settlers wrote in their diaries and letters of the "desolate," "barren" landscape, their isolation, and an often extreme distress. As reports of a peculiar insanity, and suicides, trickled eastward, the term "prairie madness" arose as a catchall to describe the emergent anxiety, depression, and psychosis. Nellie McClung, a suffragette from Manitoba, traveled across the Canadian plains to speak to women's groups about the illness. "Do any of you . . . know what it is to be so lonely . . . that you hear strange whispering voices close to you and feel they are plotting against you?" she asked in 1911. "So lonely that when you pull down the blind at night you pin it on each side close to the wall to shut out the great white desolation?" Here is the horizon that McClung described as "rushing forward . . . pressing upon you until you cannot breathe."

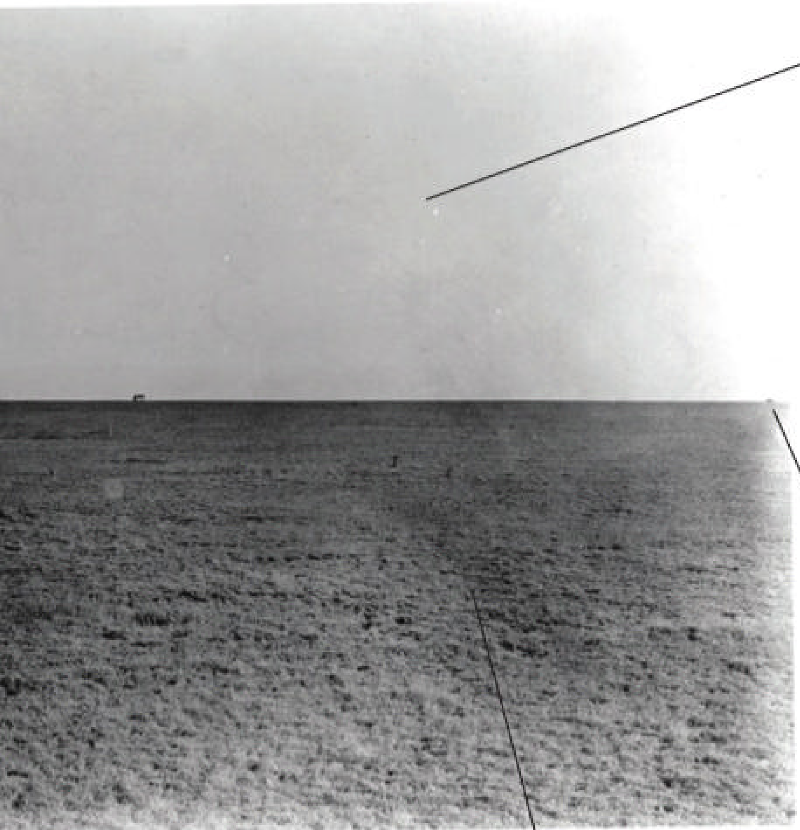
"On people not born there," wrote the painter John Noble, who was born in Kansas in 1874, "the plains sometimes have an appalling effect . . . You look on, on, on, out into space, out almost beyond time itself." To white settlers, the various American frontiers were each alien for a time and understood as violent wildernesses. But the void of the prairie was a total departure from the home terrains of the new arrivals. The sky was often described as closed—a "gray dome." The treelessness, captured here, was haunting, and it made for unusually dangerous land, allowing for fires that would rip across it at speeds of up to thirteen miles per hour, burning at temperatures of more than 700 degrees Fahrenheit, and creating their own lightning systems. Nearly half of the world's tornadoes occur on the Great Plains, and in 1879, a series of storms broke out across its southern and central regions. One observer wrote of a "green-rimmed cone" that "rose and fell in its motion like a monster wave." The early meteorologist John Park Finley described the cyclones' "agonies of death"—bodies wrenched into the earth, eyes and ears stoppered with mud. The Plains grasses grew up to eight feet tall and in calmer weather regularly swallowed children whole. In 1874, Bliss Isely, in Kansas, wrote of fleeing from a "white glistening cloud" of locusts with her baby clutched in her arms. The year before, the swarm in Minnesota was 1,800 miles long and moved, said one journalist, at "racehorse speed." The insects devoured thousands of acres of crops in days, eating the handles off tools and the wool off sheep.

ATION

THE RANGE

on the Great Plains

nd Nally



The authors of Great Plains literature, writes the scholar Diane Dufva Quantic, "share a conviction that one must first come to terms" with what we see here: a "vast stretch of space that leaves no place to hide from the physical emptiness or psychological horrors." Perhaps the most famous depiction of this struggle is found in Ole Edvart Rølvaag's *Giants in the Earth*, which follows a Norwegian family settling in the Dakota Territory. In a chapter titled "The Great Plain Drinks the Blood of Christian Men and Is Satisfied," Rølvaag describes "the strange spell of sadness which the unbroken solitude cast upon the minds of some." "Many took their own lives; asylum after asylum was filled with disordered beings who had once been human. It is hard for the eye to wander from sky line to sky line, year in and year out, without finding a resting place!" The mother, Beret, is driven insane with fear and begins hiding in a chest to escape the view: "A sense of desolation so profound settled upon her that she seemed unable to think at all. It would not do to gaze any longer at the terror out there."

"An alarming amount of insanity occurs in the new prairie States," E. V. Smalley, the editor of *The Northwest Magazine*, wrote in *The Atlantic* in 1893. "In no civilized country," he said, "have the cultivators of the soil adapted their home life so badly to the conditions of nature" as had the people of the Plains. Smalley had observed the troubled settlers for ten years, and he blamed the Homestead Act for building a country of the lonely and deranged. He campaigned for a vital restructuring, arguing that "the isolated farmhouse must be abandoned, and the people must draw together in villages." He believed settlements should be modeled on the scattered French communities of Manitoba, where land was divided "into long, narrow strips running back from the river banks, and thus formed a continuous village many miles long." A distant neighbor to the Haskell County home may be seen here, at the photograph's blanching edge. Smalley's was a fundamental dispute with the dominant vision for America's future, championed at the time by the historian Frederick Jackson Turner. Turner argued that our democracy could only have taken root on the prairie, where far-flung settlements evaded governmental oversight. It was this frontier, he said, that gave Americans their "coarseness and strength," their "acuteness and inquisitiveness," and the "buoyancy and exuberance which comes with freedom."

More than half of the homesteaders failed the five-year occupancy requirement, either dying or abandoning their land to flee east after bouts of drought, disease, debt, and madness. The wind on the prairie was incessant, as was its sibilance through the grass. In 2022, researchers from Binghamton University found that the psychoacoustic environment of the Plains, the precise frequencies of its wind and rain, likely contributed to the phenomenon of prairie madness. Rølvaag transcribed the gusts through the fields: "'Tish-ah!' said the grass . . . 'Tish-ah, tish-ah!' . . . Never had it said anything else—never would it say anything else." ■

Leland Nally is a writer and filmmaker from Los Angeles.

Illustration by Xiao Hua Yang

THE MELANCHOLY UNIVERSE

Michael H. Parkinson reappears on the No. 56 streetcar

By László F. Földényi
Translated from the Hungarian by John Bakti

I. NORWICH, SUMMER OF 1974

He received my address from a Hungarian poet, young at the time and since deceased, who decades later became notorious for racist right-wing statements. In the autumn of 1973 he sent me a letter from England. He wrote in an elaborate style, spiked with broken Hungarian. He informed me that he wanted to travel to Hungary to brush up on the language. He invited me to stay at his house in Norwich for a month. If it suited me, I could host him in Hungary the following year. I was a graduate student in English and eagerly accepted the offer. Michael H. Parkinson, an instructor at the University of East Anglia, was twenty-nine years old at the time, seven years my senior.

I arrived in Norwich via bus in late July 1974. Faithful to our arrangement, Michael raised the Hungarian book in his hand—a volume by György Moldova—although there was no one else waiting in the station. He wore a coarse jacket of rust-brown tweed, and the collar of his light-blue shirt was frayed. It was freshly laundered, but faded from much laundering. We introduced ourselves. Relieved that I was the guest he was expecting, Michael laughed in delight. But this was no ordinary laughter: it was a loud whinny that broke off as suddenly as it began. He would often repeat this performance—his way of releasing tension. For example, when he found after a lengthy search a volume containing a needed quote, I would hear it from his room at the far end of the house. A year later, in the winter of 1975, in the upper tiers of the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music in Budapest, he broke into applause after the first movement of a symphonic work, and, realizing he was alone in this, let out another whinny. Those few members of the audience who had not already been looking in our direction turned their heads to do so.

Upon our arrival, Michael gave me a tour of his house on Lilburne Avenue, which looked relatively new. He showed me my room, the bathroom, and the kitchen. Then he took me outside to look at the small garden surrounded by his L-shaped house. I had seen English gardens on an earlier visit to the country—his garden bore no resemblance to them. The lawn was a jungle of weeds. It was also littered with garbage, mostly kitchen waste. That was where he tossed out everything, and from time to time, during a general housecleaning, he

László F. Földényi is a critic and a professor of art theory at the University of Theatre and Film Arts in Budapest. This essay is adapted from his book A melankólia dicsérete, *originally published in 2017.*

packed it all into large garbage bags. Compared to the chaos outdoors, the house itself possessed a surprising air of puritanical tidiness, even his study, which was bursting with books. It was the residence of a man who was content with the bare necessities, and considered even these not very important.

He taught comparative literature, and had been working for some years on his doctoral dissertation. He focused on the work of Charles-Ferdinand Ramuz. I had never heard of this Swiss author, active in the first half of the twentieth century, about whom Michael spoke abashedly, as if apologizing for his devotion to a subject unfamiliar to me. Nor was Ramuz known by anybody in England, he said, except for himself. He spent his days tracing the footsteps of an unknown. Possibly this was his way of trying to become invisible.

I had a feeling that the same desire accounted for his decision to learn Hungarian. He intended to delve into a language few people in England understood. In 1956, at the age of eleven, in response to news of the revolution, he had lived for months in a Hungary within his mind, resorting to a map of this distant country that must have seemed as foreign to him as the land of the Mohicans. He began to study the language—at first by himself, later through a summer course in Hungary. That was when he obtained my address. Occasionally he would start speaking the language in front of his friends in Norwich, taking pleasure in not being understood. At times this stunt proved rather tedious.

He studied Hungarian with the same perseverance that he devoted to Ramuz. With similar persistence he would, every once in a while, on a sudden whim, embark on an endless hike, often in the late afternoon. Later, in a letter, he wrote, “My enjoyment of long solitary walks seemed to indicate that I was once more able to be alone with my own thoughts and remain relaxed.” Even his handwriting seemed to evince a vast inner solitude. His script was without any telltale characteristics and yet this very shortcoming made his handwriting instantly recognizable. He did not drive, but when he later moved to Nigeria for two years to teach English he made an effort to learn. As he wrote to me, his greatest feat was driving the car round and round an enormous tree.

To sally forth with determination but without a fixed goal: this was Michael. He was the most melancholic man I have ever known. Possibly Sir Thomas Browne may have been more so, though back then I had not yet heard of this seventeenth-century English physician-philosopher whose tomes I eventually came to devour, seeking out the oldest editions, and who, like Michael, had chosen Norwich as his place of residence. Michael never spoke about him, although he might as well have inscribed upon the wall of his study what, three hundred years earlier, Browne in his treatise *Religio Medici* had expressed this way: “considering the thousand dores that lead to death doe thanke my God that we can die but once.” A few hours spent in Michael’s company sufficed to make one sense the deep melancholia that suffused his entire being. He embarked on lengthy hikes without having decided on a destination. He loved merry-go-rounds and giant Ferris wheels. We once took a bicycle trip from Norwich to Great Yarmouth, where in the amusement park along the beach he seemed happier than I’d ever seen him.

MICHAEL WAS TRULY AFFLICTED WITH MELANCHOLIA, AND LIVED IN A STATE OF PERMANENT OPPOSITION TO THE WORLD AND TO HIMSELF

Michael was a childless bachelor. His entire family consisted of a mother and an aunt, who both idolized him. They lived in St. Albans and called every Sunday. He filled his life with friends. On Saturday evenings we would get together at the home of one or another of his university colleagues. “They range from the tolerable to the delightful,” he once wrote. I have forgotten almost all of their names, but I do remember Janine Dakyns, who always gave us a ride. Also Thomas Elsaesser, originally from Germany, who founded East Anglia’s film studies department. I was happy to discover that he went on to write the definitive monograph on Fassbinder. Decades later we ran into each other at a party in Amsterdam, where he reminisced about his years in Norwich. He mentioned that W. G. Sebald, who taught in the German department and was around Michael’s age, had usually attended those Saturday night get-togethers; I had no recollection of him. Michael’s university colleagues had clearly been fond of him, though I had the feeling they were treating him with special care, mindful of his underlying melancholia. “The gradually approaching thesis deadline made me vulnerable,” he wrote in a letter to me, after struggling with the project for years. But I knew that the true source of his vulnerability was existence itself.

He was twenty-nine years old, but to me he seemed ageless. He was both a child and an old man. He had no lover. He seemed to be the very embodiment of asexuality. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that he had completely repressed his sexuality—which of necessity had to manifest itself elsewhere, in other ways. In any case, he kept his physical distance from the world and its provocations. Even though he moved among us, and not entirely without skill—he had a sense for practical matters—it was as if he lived under a bell jar. His was a life of innocence, like that of a solitary fool of God. Perhaps in another century he would have been a hermit or a pilgrim. As it was, he became a university instructor and sequestered himself in his library. He worked at an inconceivably slow pace, and talked about his work wherever he went. That was his way of concealing the truth of what he was actually gleaning from his mountains of books: the strangeness of his life, perhaps, or its brevity.

In December 1975, a year and a half after my visit, Michael spent a month in Hungary—part of the time in Budapest and part in Debrecen with me. We spent Christmas together. He got along splendidly with my grandmother. Using an aluminum comb, she attempted to straighten out his unruly hair; these occasions made Michael radiant with happiness. One morning he set out on a walk. It was late when he returned, with mud all over his boots and clothes. He was carrying a map of Hajdú-Bihar county that he had found at an antiquarian bookstore back in England. It dated from before the First World War. Michael enthusiastically related how, though he had found none of the old roads, he nonetheless followed the indications on the map. He trudged through fields soaked by rain and snow, and at one farmhouse a watchdog nearly attacked him. He had also come upon Soviet army barracks surrounded by barbed wire that he had to walk around. I was petrified. Had the Russians stopped him and asked for identification, how would I have explained my English guest arriving, on a December evening, at a military base in the middle of the countryside? Sitting at the kitchen table, Michael could not understand my distress and laughed, eating heaps of the poppy-seed noodles that he tasted in Hungary for the first time in his life. I gaped in disbelief at all that food disappearing into that skinny body.

We kept up a correspondence for a while. In increasingly infrequent letters, he told me of his years in Africa, his walking tours of Switzerland where he followed in the footsteps of Ramuz, and evenings spent with our acquaintances at the university. He also told me about his mother and aunt, at whose house I had stayed for a night. In March 1989 he moved to a new address—on Portersfield Road—and his mother and aunt moved into his former residence. I was unable to tell how this proximity worked out; I did not visit Michael again in Norwich.

That same year, *The Modern Language Review* published an article he wrote, a review of a German volume of essays on nineteenth-century French lyric poetry. The article that followed his was a review of a French publication, titled *Mélancolie et Opposition,* that dealt with the melancholia evident in nineteenth-century literature. It should have been written by Michael. After all, he was truly afflicted with melancholia, and lived in a state of permanent opposition to the world and to himself. But he never spoke of this. He was no rebel, nor did he ever pass judgment on anything. His very existence was an act of criticism. He proved a tough morsel to swallow for a world that, already in the Eighties and Nineties, was doing everything it could to distract people with superfluous things. In this global collusion of distractions there was no longer any room for Michael.

Eventually we lost touch. His last postcard, a reproduction of a nineteenth-century etching of the Pont Neuf, was dated December 28, 1989. There was no reply to the letter I wrote back. The next time I received news of him was more than a decade later, in a new millennium, on the No. 56 streetcar in Budapest.

II. THE NO. 56 STREETCAR

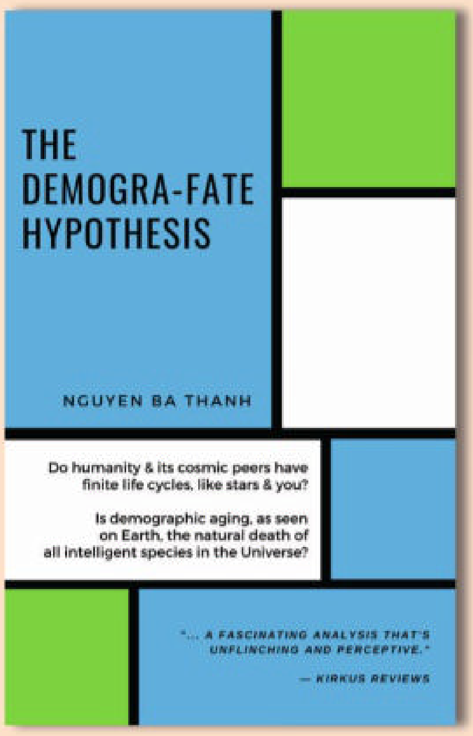
Beginning in the Nineties this was the line I took each morning. I would usually read a book when I managed to find a seat, as I did on a spring day in 2001. I had recently bought *The Rings of Saturn* by W. G. Sebald, who some months later would die in a car crash. Sebald had lived in England since the late Sixties, and taught at the University of East Anglia starting in 1970. When his novels began appearing in the Nineties, I read them one after another. I started with *Vertigo,* followed by *The Emigrants.* When *The Rings of Saturn* appeared, its jacket copy especially piqued my curiosity, as it indicated that the book was about Sebald's 1992 walking tour of Suffolk. Eighteen years before him, I had roamed around that region myself—not on foot, but on a bicycle. I was looking forward to retracing old memories.

Seated on the streetcar I opened the novel. Right away, in the second paragraph, it was as though I had been struck by a jolt of electricity. Sebald opens the book by narrating

"Nguyen Ba Thanh wonders if death by old age is civilisation's destiny."
– *Philosophy Now*

"A gripping reflection of the murky future of Homo Sapiens."
– *Kirkus Reviews*

From aging human societies, **The Demogra-Fate Hypothesis** posits a natural demographic old age (and death) for intelligent species. If all things—your fading body, stars, the dissipating universe—inevitably age and die, can species like ours stay forever young? Is population aging that natural age-and-die ending for humanity and its cosmic peers?


THE DEMOGRA-FATE HYPOTHESIS
NGUYEN BA THANH
Do humanity & its cosmic peers have finite life cycles, like stars & you?
Is demographic aging, as seen on Earth, the natural death of all intelligent species in the Universe?
"... A FASCINATING ANALYSIS THAT'S UNFLINCHING AND PERCEPTIVE."
— KIRKUS REVIEWS

"Evolution's conceptual end point is finally reached when the brainiest wild species can and does party itself out of existence, consciously and merrily. … When these app-addicted apes become fossils in this lost oasis, somewhere in a nearby galaxy, another wild species will blindly evolve to boost brain power, create technology, solve hunger, enjoy fun, reproduce less… This ancient cycle of blind evolution may have played out a zillion times across infinity."

The Demogra-Fate Hypothesis
is available on Amazon

his hospital stay in August 1993, exactly one year after his walking tour. In his room on the eighth floor, his window was draped with black netting. He would often lean against that window, gazing out, and find that everything appeared utterly alien to him, though he lived in this city. He compared his situation to that of Gregor Samsa, who felt similarly when he looked out his own window on Charlotte Street. Gregor, transformed into a "horrible vermin," trying to immerse himself in memories of his past, finds that after a while he is unable to see clearly even the hospital across the street. To quote Kafka:

> If he had not been positive that he was living on Charlotte Street—a quiet but still very much a city street—he might have believed that he was looking out of his window into a desert where the gray sky and the gray earth were indistinguishably fused.

When Kafka wrote these lines, the work of Sigmund Exner, a Viennese physiologist who studied insect vision, was still well-known. In 1891, he published a photograph that had been taken through the extracted eyeball of a firefly by means of a microscope and a complicated system of lenses. The image is recognizable but blurry. Gregor's vision of the world is fractured, indistinct, like that of the melancholy fly whom, William Blake laments, "some blind hand" might brush away, ending in an instant its "summer's play." Kafka does not tell us whether things grew blurry for Gregor because his vision had mutated into that of an insect, or whether he had become so immersed in his past that everything he now saw was filtered through memory. How does Gloucester put it in *King Lear*? "As flies to wanton boys, are we to th' gods: / They kill us for their sport." Perhaps Sebald had a foreboding that his days were numbered. He sensed the presence of extinction.

There in the hospital, Sebald thinks of Michael Parkinson down below, in the city fading in the dying light, "still alive in his small house in the Portersfield Road." He characterized Michael, this bachelor in his late forties, as "one of the most innocent people I have ever met." Sebald describes how conscientiously Michael immersed himself in his work, and how, on account of the modesty of his needs, "some people found his manner to border on eccentricity." While people around him acted as non-stop consumers, justifying their existence in this manner, Michael hardly ever went shopping. Sebald only ever saw him wear a navy-blue or a rust-brown jacket with leather patches.

"But then without warning last May," continues Sebald—and this could only have meant May 1994—"Michael, who had not been seen for some days, was found dead in his bed, lying on his side and already quite rigid, his face curiously mottled with red blotches." According to the inquest, "he had died of unknown causes," to which Sebald adds, "in the deep and dark hours of the night." Not much later, to the great shock of their colleagues at the university, came the death of Janine, "who was so unable to bear the loss of the ingenuous, almost childlike friendship they had shared, that a few weeks after his death she had succumbed to a disease that swiftly consumed her body."

As I rode in the streetcar in Budapest, I could not take my eyes from the printed letters of Michael's name. I read and re-read the two pages on which he appears, returning always to that name. At the last stop I remained seated for a while before getting off, as dazed as if I'd been hit over the head. Among the passersby I felt myself to be in possession of a special secret. It was as if I had stepped into the world of Sebald's book. Or as if the book had opened up and poured its contents into the world around me. Sebald's writing tends to offer the possibility of such a passage. He writes about so-called facts, the truth of which he at times even attempts to substantiate by means of photographs. But then it turns out that the truth of his facts is only realized when Sebald draws them into his spiraling fantasies, and they resurface as unverifiable memories. (A recent biography of Sebald, which makes a great deal of his freeness with fact, establishes that Michael actually died in April 1994, not May, from a drug overdose; the inquest could not determine whether it was intentional.)

Intangible realities shape our most mundane experiences. Take, for instance, vivid dreams. These can overwhelm the mind for days; I sometimes awake from a dream feeling giddy, almost feverish. A dream once caused me to become infatuated with a woman I had barely noticed before. A dream once helped me find the answer to a matter that had tortured me for days with its seeming insolubility. I can never quite dismiss dreams of this sort. They can't truly belong to "reality." Yet I have remained their prisoner for hours or even days. They have frequently proved more real than all that has happened to me during waking hours.

Michael's name, when I caught sight of it in *The Rings of Saturn*, affected me in this way. The book led me back into my past. I understood now why Michael never replied to my last letter. I felt intoxicated, as if the certainties of the world around me had become unstable. But in the meantime I experienced a growing awareness of my own being and existence, of my possessing a center that, like a dream, would be futile to try to define. Having become unsure of my surroundings I focused on finding my self—a being from which I had always been inseparable, yet one that I had never been able to glimpse with such immediacy. And all the while I couldn't stop thinking of Michael.

Later, once I calmed down, instead of reading on I began to leaf randomly through the book. I imagined that I might appear in its pages, as that twenty-two-year-old Hungarian Michael took to meet his colleagues on Saturday evenings. Of course, that would have been too much to ask for. But the age of twenty-two does figure in the book. At one point on his walking tour, Sebald visited Michael Hamburger, a poet and translator who had emigrated from Germany in 1933, at his home on the outskirts of Middleton. When later reading Hamburger's memoirs, Sebald discovered that the two men had both encountered Stanley Kerry, who taught German at the University of Manchester, at the age of twenty-two—Hamburger in 1944, Sebald in 1966. For Sebald, this intersection of their lives at the same age must have had a particular significance:

> No matter how often I tell myself that chance happenings of this kind occur far more often than we suspect, since we all move, one after the other, along the same roads mapped out for us by our origins and our hopes, my rational mind is nonetheless unable to lay the ghosts of repetition that haunt me with ever greater frequency.

Reading the book as a friend of Michael Parkinson's, I could not help but feel that I—also twenty-two years old when I met him—had similarly become entangled in Sebald's web, spun from the ghosts of repetition. I was entitled to this feeling all the more considering that Hamburger had been only twenty, and not twenty-two, in 1944. Sebald, his close friend, was surely aware of this. For him, changing the facts was more important than clinging to them. In the words of Heinrich von Kleist: "Probability is not always on the side of truth."

Sebald was willing to sacrifice "reality" in favor of a more dreamlike reality of another sort, which he held to be more truthful. Describing his journeys in *The Rings of Saturn,* he proceeds according to the "logic" of chance. He allows everything he encounters, everything he sees, everything that momentarily crosses his mind, to stand by itself, without antecedents or consequences. It may be the skull of the melancholic Thomas Browne, or a herring, or the description of a sea battle in 1672, or George Wyndham Le Strange, who participated in the liberation of Bergen-Belsen, or Swinburne, or even some unknown individual fallen into oblivion beyond the reach of history: for Sebald, each constitutes a potential component of a personal universe with a private entrance. This universe possesses no directionality or purpose, has no history in the sense of a red thread running through everything and pointing ahead; it shows no visible coherence, no laws. It has no reality. And yet at times it can be more real than everything else. At such times, one crosses its threshold with an eagerness that nothing can diminish, and one's own so-called reality seems a disappointment. This new universe proves not a whit less dramatic and fateful than what we believe to be the familiar one. It is like a vast crime novel, full of millions of suspicious pieces of evidence but lacking a detective to make sense of it all. Everything bears the suggestion of conclusive proof, but the case never goes to trial.

Such a universe provides no well-mapped itinerary. It creates the impression of an impassable labyrinth, but without Ariadne's thread or a Minotaur. Instead, Melancholia squats in the center, a center that keeps splintering. Anything may happen here. A man who is twenty years old may become twenty-two. Someone we believe to be alive may turn out to have been dead for some time—only to produce a more profound effect on us than any living person. Or, sitting in a streetcar, reading a book, we find a reality weightier than anything we would see looking out the window.

In this universe everything tilts just a bit, just enough that the trappings of the ordinary universe remain visible while losing their coherence. Here there are no connections, but still one has an unmistakable feeling that, thanks to some distant and unidentifiable force, things are not unrelated.

Michael H. Parkinson never answered my last letter, and then he did. He addressed his message to me without a word. What else could this be but melancholia seeping into our works and days, before unstoppably flooding everything? ■

Darwin Panama

A warm weather hat with Australian styling, handwoven in Ecuador from toquilla fiber. Water resistant coating, braided kangaroo leather band. Reinforced 4½" crown, 3" brim. Finished in USA.

S (6¾-6⅞) M (7-7⅛) L (7¼-7⅜)
XL (7½-7⅝) XXL (7¾)

#1649 Darwin Panama___$140

Panama Fedora

Classic sun protection handwoven in Ecuador from toquilla fiber. Water resistant coating, grosgrain ribbon band. Reinforced 4½" crown, 2½" brim. Finished in USA.

S (6¾-6⅞) M (7-7⅛) L (7¼-7⅜)
XL (7½-7⅝) XXL (7¾)

#1648 Panama Fedora___$115

Add $9 handling per order. Satisfaction guaranteed.

Shop on davidmorgan.com or request our print catalog

#KB-336-SSC
#1746
#1622

Panama Hats from Ecuador
Northwest Jewelry Designs
Akubra® Hats from Australia

David Morgan

800-324-4934 davidmorgan.com
11812 N Creek Pkwy N, Ste 103•Bothell, WA 98011

TO ATTIS

By Evan Kennedy

Just as you, Attis, swear devotion to Magna Mater—
the great mother!—I follow several: Judy Garland,
Mary Beard, Tori Amos, Lisa Jarnot, Alice Notley,
Yuja Wang, Jackqueline Frost, Simone Weil, a few others
                                        a vision out of Christine de Pizan

Brilliant as they are they cannot solve all my problems,
but Attis, spare me the suggestion I do as you did.
Why must you and fellow worshippers castrate
yourselves, cut open your arms and shoulders?
Why dance wildly around a sacred pine whipping
yourselves knucklebones beating timbrels
and pine cones lacerating bare chests splattering tree
and altar with sweat and gore then why apply gold leaf
to your freshly wounded genitals?
                To imitate harvest
                            in human inclination toward the eternal . . .
                To throw yourself
                            before a woman who will not reject your desire.
Like you I propagate nothing but lyric.

Attis, you'd agree with graffiti from Imperial Rome:
                Baths, wine, and sex ruin our bodies
                but make life worth living.
By that standard I've lived far beyond my thirty-seven years—
I suffer a million sorrows, yet
the thought of your severed balls hitting the dirt—
two dull thuds—makes me shudder, puts an ache in mine.
Two jocks I went to college with called theirs *evil brains*

Attis, tell me how to stop hating on poets, gawking at
their selfishness, defilement by ambition, sex lives,
careerism, countless moral failings, posing as Marxists
while bankrupting students, ruining friendships
so that I fear trusting friends who write.

Evan Kennedy is the author, most recently, of the collection Metamorphoses, *which was published in March by City Lights.*

Deliver me from the despair of Jack Spicer, Weldon Kees,
Landis Everson, John Wieners, Steve Abbott, Sam D’Allesandro
(If these names are unfamiliar, substitute them with
those like you (same city and obsessions) who died too soon.)

Augustine was disgusted by your followers, their
“hair moist with perfume, faces made-up,
limbs flaccid, walk effeminate, wandering through
Carthage demanding people subsidize their
shameful life”   while a critic calls Judy Garland’s fans
a flutter of fags   trunks full of roses dragged
into New York’s Palace Theater   It all alters my body
as leaden weights are snipped to free me from
terrestrial restrictions extending my limbs seraphic
broadening my chest loosening me from gravity so
that my voice reaches empyrean registers
a note sustained over sixty seconds captivating an
audience who had stopped holding their breath
Like fans of castrati said *Death is in your throat*

Attis, not all Americans think you’re crazy.
Do (as in “dough”), leader of Heaven’s Gate,
has wet dreams about a devotee, a young actor from L.A. Listen,
I get it. For an L.A. boy I’d crawl from Melrose to Echo Park
whimpering outside his building and texting *Why no reply?*

To become solitary Ovid in early twenty-first century
imperial decline—sure, I’ll play *that* role, but
communal living? No way, that’s not for me!
It occurs to Do that the “bodily vehicle” requires customizing.
Nodding along to his plan, a flurry of suck-ups bicker over
who deserves to lose their evil brains first.
They didn’t know you, Attis, but in a sense became
your devotees, receiving brand-new Nikes
before eating applesauce laced with phenobarbital, tying plastic
bags over their heads, and ascending into space.
As they joked, *Just* Do *it*.
Nike: winged goddess of victory

Late one night in the dorm I heard the jocks laughing about
pissing in someone’s shampoo   Mystery solved:
earlier I was lathering my scalp with feeble liquidy bubbles
and suspected the shower head dripped into the bottle.
What’s worse than my false hypothesis? The jocks
were cute, I took retroactive pleasure: regret’s antithesis

Each Magna Mater circles me
Their poems texts lyrics fill the flaw I was born into
Attis, make me good in my bodily vehicle
but not yet ■

Introducing the lightest folding power chair in the world

The Journey Air Elite features the latest carbon fiber technology for the ultimate in portability and performance

Mobility issues affect over 1 in 5 Americans. These individuals, and their loved ones, know how decreased mobility can result in loss of independence, pain and falling hazards. They are often stuck at home, missing out on a variety of activities, in a vicious cycle that diminishes their quality of life. In the past, mobility devices like scooters and power chairs were too heavy and bulky to transport easily. Now, carbon fiber material invented for the aerospace program has been used to create the ultimate mobility device. It's called the Journey Air Elite ... and there's nothing else like it on earth.

At only 26 pounds, the Journey Air Elite combines lightweight portability with world class performance. It's simple to use joystick and powerful dual-motor drive system enables you to zip around quickly and safely. It's easy to maneuver, never tips, fits easily through doorways, and can go right up to a table or desk. Once you are done, just one pull on the seat handle folds it up. There's a fold-down back to make it even easier to stow and store.

What makes it the best?

- Ultra-lightweight yet durable
- Speedy and maneuverable
- Comfortable and easy-to-operate
- Pulls right up to desks and tables
- 8-mile range on a single charge
- Perfect for dining, shopping, sightseeing and lots more!
- Foldable for easy storage and transport

NEW
ONLY 26 POUNDS!

It features flat-free tires and rear anti-tippers for added convenience and safety.

Folds flat in seconds

Just imagine how this chair can improve your life and make it easier for loved ones and caregivers to accompany you to activities and events you would have missed in the past. Don't spend another day stuck at home. Call today, and a helpful, knowledgeable consultant will help you get a Journey Air Elite of your very own. Don't wait – call now!

journey air ELITE

Call toll-free now

1-888-530-1631

Please mention code 117853 when ordering.

enjoying life never gets old™

journey HEALTH & LIFESTYLE

BBB ACCREDITED BUSINESS Rating of A+

Journey Air Elite is a personal electric vehicle and is not a medical device nor wheelchair. It is not intended for medical purposes to provide mobility to persons restricted to a sitting position. Journey Air Elite is not covered by Medicare nor Medicaid. © 2023 Journey Health and Lifestyle

87001

RECOVERY

By Jennifer Gilmore

April said that when she got healthy—if she did, she said, *if*—she wanted to have Julia's body. It was the ideal, April said, curvy but still thin enough, I should know from that time I had to draw you. She had leaned over Julia and traced her outline. It was one of the activities, along with closing your eyes and picking your anchor, the place where you can go in your mind when you get triggered. For Julia this was a place in Maine, on a lake cliffed by rocks, where her grandparents had once owned a home. Each day Julia watched for the postman to deliver the mail, his hand on the outboard motor steering him toward the dock.

April hovered over Julia, who lay prone on the large strip of yellow paper, and Julia felt April's empty rotten breath on her face, breath that has only breathed and tasted its own breath. The pencil moved along her sides. When it had traced her entirety, Julia rose to standing. April's outlines were shaky outlines. April shook, always. The outline revealed itself to be far smaller than Julia had expected. As was the hope; the point of the exercise was to reveal the women's body dysmorphia. Other than being young, Julia was no different. Now, the art therapist said, let's color us in. Here is: magazines sparkles paint crayons buttons charcoal cotton balls. Now: one side is your good side, the front; this is your best self. This is your body. What do you think of it? What does it look like? Bright colors for your good self: white buttons sparkles sugar spice glitter good things good good girl things. On the back, where our negative feelings lie: newsprint black X's Band-Aids pencil shavings magazine photographs of women's bodies heads ripped off all our self-loathing.

Julia cried when April said that about her body. She had held her hands to her face and cried because just then she realized that they all—Ariel and Sally and April—saw her as the Other, as the fat one. She wished she'd been anorexic, in control, clean, dry, baby-powder fresh. She cried for

Jennifer Gilmore is the author of five novels, and an assistant professor at Lafayette College.

Collage by Katherine Streeter

FROM THE
HARPER'S MAGAZINE
ARCHIVE

Not sure where to start with 172 years of archives?

SUBSCRIBE TO

Our "From the Archive" newsletter

It's a curated selection of excellent writing that helps put the week's events into greater context, delivered to your inbox.

SIGN UP AT HARPERS.ORG/ NEWSLETTERS

what they thought of her and for what she thought of herself.

When the women were recovered or their insurance ran out, they left. And new women replaced them. One particular replacement who would stay with Julia long after she'd left the ward herself was a woman who came in late at night. It was as if she'd been dragged in. She was not in her right mind. Perhaps she'd been drinking or had taken drugs. Julia was interested in her because, although she was older than Julia—all the women were; her position as the youngest had somehow become important to her, vital even—still this woman was cool, the way Julia saw cool, and no one else on the ward was cool to Julia. The woman wore combat boots and her hair was dyed black and she had several safety pins in her ears, a leather jacket, broken in. She sat down in the lounge and held court. Bulimic, she said, running her hand across her chest, gesturing toward an invisible sign. Favorite food is ice cream because you get to taste it twice. She stomped her feet.

Several hours later, in the middle of the night, this girl screamed out in pain. A caffeine headache, they were told the next morning. The story went that even though there was no caffeine allowed, they had a Coke brought in for her, to ease her off it. She had been forced to choose between a regular Coke and the headache, because they wouldn't give her Diet. The story went that she had given the nurses the finger and refused the Coke.

That was the news that traveled through the ward at breakfast, where the bulimics could barely hear for the horrible sound of their mastication, and the anorexics couldn't listen, so focused were they on their fear. But Julia heard it, through her own chewing, and subsequently she would try to model herself after this girl. She wanted to be able to go against something. Anything. She feared her disease was a disease of complicity. She would become hard and she would change many times and then one day she would soften, but not until she had a child and she had been disarmed and forced into the care of another. A child would soften her. Loving animals would also soften her but not like a child would.

On the ward Julia was not yet tough and not yet soft because she was not yet formed. She did not yet know, for example, what it meant on those nights when she would hear the moans of the women on the ward making love to one another. She did not know there was pleasure to be found there. Often the moans of satisfaction around her were what woke her from her dreams of fishermen. Her psychiatrist was named Dr. Fisher. Julia's main complaint to him was how she still had to do her homework while on the ward. She was reading *Hamlet*; she had to call her teachers to discuss the play. Which she did, in the little cluttered office saved for nurses. It was unfair, the psychiatrist agreed. Getting healthy takes time. Dr. Fisher was short and fat and redheaded and what Julia would remember most about him was the way fishermen appeared in so many of her dreams.

The drawings they did on the ward were meant as keepsakes, evidence. Discharged in time to apply to college, as her parents had insisted, Julia would bring hers home and secure it with gray putty to the back of her closet. It would hang there as evidence, even when she left for college five months later and turned to more socially acceptable forms of obliteration. Her mother cleared out most of the other things in that closet—a cut-up soccer sweatshirt, lace-up Joan & David leather boots, a field hockey stick, a yellow lion won at Kings Dominion—all to the Goodwill. She left the drawing of her daughter's body though. She was afraid to touch it.

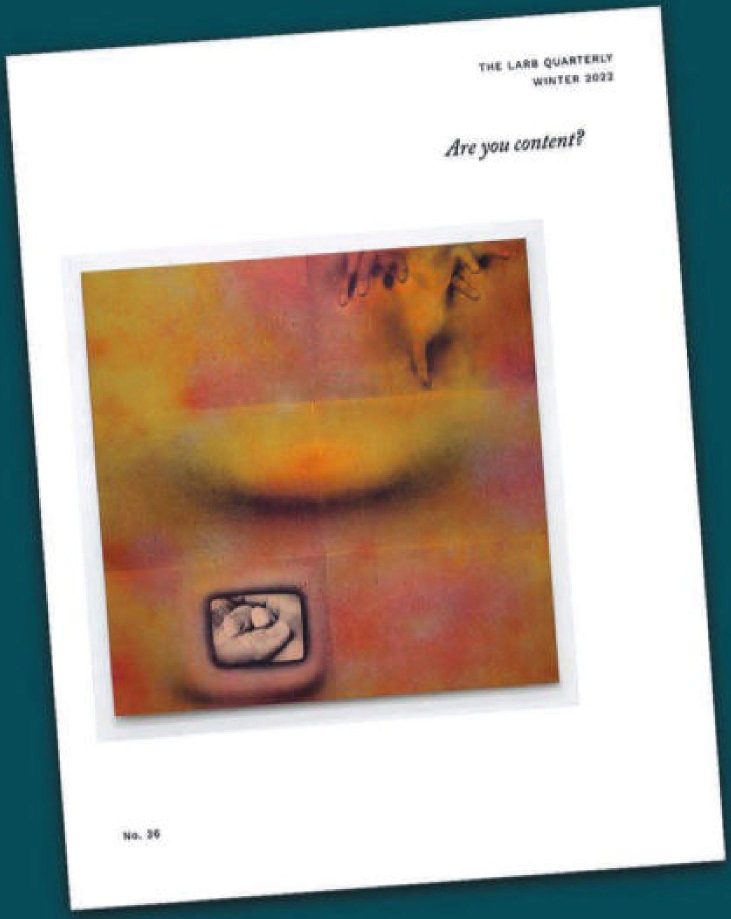
Other items replaced what had been Julia's—her dead grandmother's silver, bulging scrapbooks, hanging closets within the closet filled with mothballs—and Julia only sees the drawing years later when she returns. She is with her child. Her husband will no longer join her on these holiday trips to her parents' house because she is divorced now. Nothing was enough for her, he said. She was never satisfied. They even quarreled on their honeymoon. This was in Paris, a city so beautiful she had felt she was always in the wrong place, that she should be eating elsewhere, walking elsewhere, seeing something better than whatever was before her. Also, she had wanted the baby with such fervency she could see little else. She had stopped at nothing.

Marriage was one of life's innumerable expectations that would teach her how nothing is behind a person. As she trudges up the attic stairs—she grew up in the attic, smoking at the window seat for most of her young adulthood—she is out of breath, even though she has remained fit all these years, has not let herself go, never given in because that, she knows, would be the straw that breaks it. She feels it sometimes, the way she can't stop with the cookies and sometimes the ice cream that her husband would keep in the house and then scold her for eating when he found the pint empty. I wonder why you chose him, Dr. Fisher might once have said. What do you think that's about? On docks or boats or in huts on frozen lakes, there were so many fishermen in her dreams then. Her husband did not have a name she could dream into.

That faraway time when Julia was on the ward was as distant to her husband as his first love, his first kiss, and so, he thought, should that time be for her. Julia never found the words to tell him that his were such sweet things. Such sweet memories. All beginnings.

Winded, she reaches her room in the attic and as she opens the door to hang the dress she intends to wear for the new memory she has returned to her childhood home to make, she sees it: the young shape of her body folded in half, bowing to the weight of its own pins and buttons and burnt matches. It is impossible not to remember, not to *be* that girl again, the youngest girl in a room full of women—the discharges and the admitted, where are they? Where is April? Once not long ago, Julia saw a woman on the street with black stringy hair and steel-toed boots and a ripped biker jacket—but of course, she realized, that could be any young woman, and the woman Julia searched for, were she alive, would be middle-aged by now.

Here is the evidence: April's shaky drawing, her worst self bowed toward her. What would it be like to stop wanting, Julia wonders in much the same way she wondered then. To just be able to eat it and see it and spend it and keep it and fuck it and love it. What she had done to herself as a teenager was a way around this issue, she knows. To have what she wanted and rid herself of it. It is impossible to shake that. Want is deep and big and horrible and it cannot be chased down. She wonders, shutting the closet door, as she had wondered on the ward of grim women, how she would ever manage to keep it all down, to keep it all in. Of course, that had not been want. None of this is want. She hadn't wanted any of it. Where, Julia wonders, is her heart's desire. ■



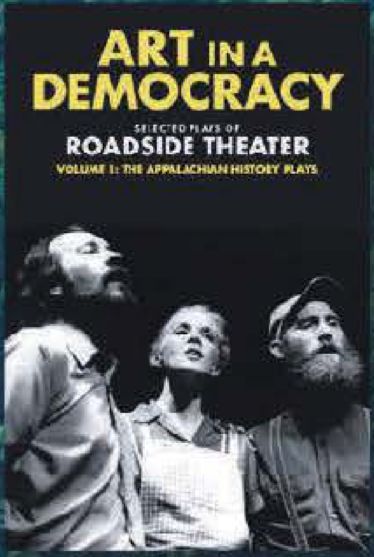
"LARB makes me feel at home here."
—*Ottessa Moshfegh*

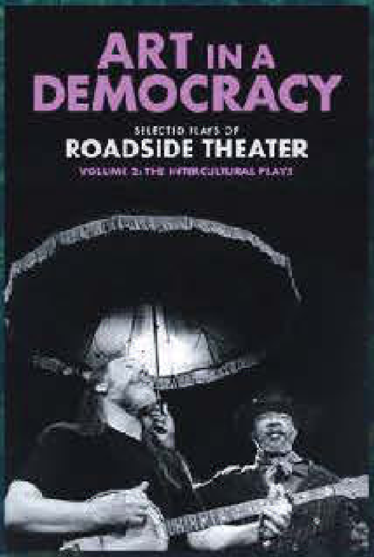
subscribe to *The LARB Quarterly*
shop.lareviewofbooks.org/subscribe

Art in a Democracy: Selected Plays of Roadside Theater

is the story of a group of community-trained Appalachian storytellers and musicians who created original plays in collaboration with their neighbors and with Black, Puerto Rican, and Indigenous grassroots theater companies that toured through more than 2000 communities across the United States.

Art in a Democracy demonstrates how communities across race, class, religion, and rural-urban lines can turn away from fear and isolation, tell their own stories, and build with their neighbors, both next door and far away.


ART IN A DEMOCRACY
SELECTED PLAYS OF
ROADSIDE THEATER
VOLUME 1: THE APPALACHIAN HISTORY PLAYS

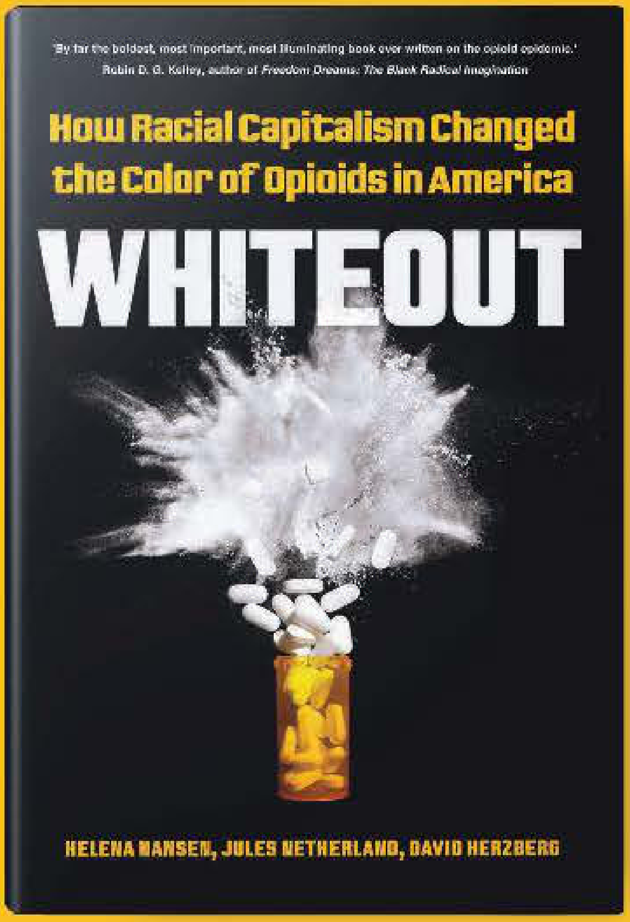

ART IN A DEMOCRACY
SELECTED PLAYS OF
ROADSIDE THEATER
VOLUME 2: THE INTERCULTURAL PLAYS

"Roadside Theater has mustered diverse local folks in declining towns in Appalachia to celebrate their traditions and restore community confidence through dramatization of local stories and music."
—Robert Putnam, author,
Bowling Alone

New Village Press | artinademocracy.org

"By far the boldest, most important, most illuminating book ever written on the opioid epidemic."

—ROBIN D.G. KELLEY, author of *Freedom Dreams*


"By far the boldest, most important, most illuminating book ever written on the opioid epidemic."
Robin D. G. Kelley, author of Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination
How Racial Capitalism Changed the Color of Opioids in America
WHITEOUT
HELENA HANSEN, JULES NETHERLAND, DAVID HERZBERG

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS

"A fascinating, well written, and important look at how racism shapes drug policy and what to do about it."

—MAIA SZALAVITZ, author of *Undoing Drugs*

ONLINE EVENT

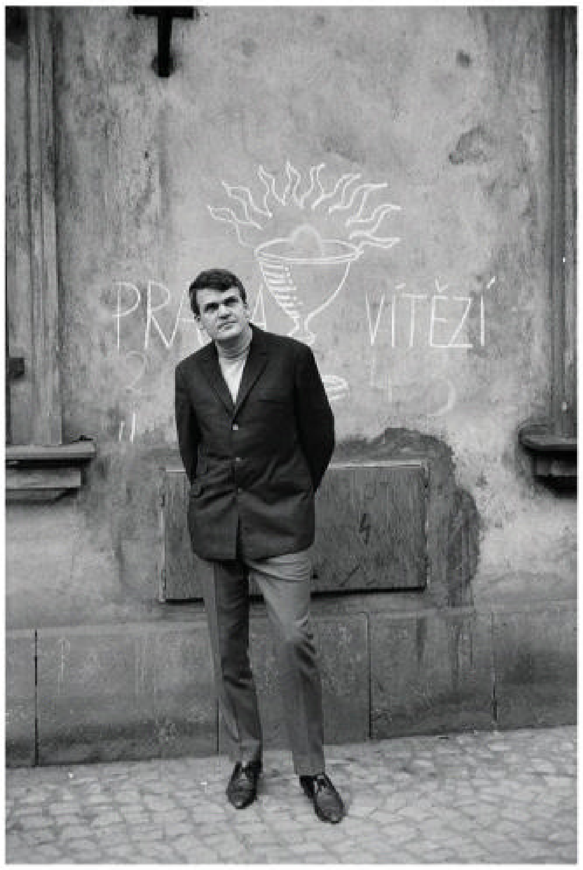
APRIL 12 AT 2:00PM ET

Join the authors **HELENA HANSEN, JULES NETHERLAND, AND DAVID HERZBERG** in conversation with **ROBIN D.G. KELLEY**

Hosted by **HAYMARKET BOOKS:**
haymarketbooks.org/events

NEW BOOKS

By Claire Messud



Left: "Milan Kundera, Prague, 1969," by Gisèle Freund © The artist. IMEC/Fonds MCC/Dist. RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, New York City. Courtesy Galerie Franz Swetec, Düsseldorf
Right: "Rising of *Rudé právo*," by Pavel Baňka © The artist. Courtesy Cermak Eisenkraft Gallery, Prague

Revision is the act of reworking something—an idea, a text—in an effort to improve it. It means to look again; in some instances, it may be the surrounding world that has altered. **A KIDNAPPED WEST: THE TRAGEDY OF CENTRAL EUROPE** (Harper, $24.99) is comprised of two historical texts by Milan Kundera, with contextual introductions by two distinguished French scholars. "The Literature of Small Nations," translated from the Czech into French by Martin Daneš and then into English by Linda Asher, is a rousing speech that Kundera delivered to the Czech writers' congress in 1967, the year before the Prague Spring. He was already celebrated in his native Czechoslovakia; his novel *The Joke*, published earlier that year, "both evoked an era and ended it," as the political scientist Jacques Rupnik writes in his introduction. Kundera focuses on the role of Czech artists during the great cultural flourishing of the Sixties. He mentions Věra Chytilová, whose film *Daisies* he has just seen; the novels of Bohumil Hrabal; and the plays of Václav Havel. It's an extraordinary moment by any standard, but particularly in a nation that had been nearly overwhelmed by German-speaking culture a century earlier. Kundera defends his homeland by arguing that it is—that he is—European, as in cosmopolitan, and laments the suppression of ideas: "If today our arts are thriving, it is thanks to the advances in freedom of thought."

The speech is paired with an article, initially published in 1983 in the now defunct journal *Le Débat*, and translated from the French by Edmund White, in which Kundera identifies "the tragedy of Central Europe" as its bifurcation. It understands itself as "the eastern border of the West," and yet it is "sensitive to the dangers of Russian might." By this time Kundera, who moved to France in 1975 and became a citizen six years later, was writing in French and noticed "with a certain astonishment" that he didn't feel "deprived" of Prague, as he told the *New York Times* in 1984. He had transformed from a Czech writer into a French one, but remained committed to Central Europe as a cultural force. The region represents "the greatest variety within the smallest space," whereas Russia is a nation founded "on the opposite principle: the smallest variety within the greatest space," and longs to expand. Kundera argues that Central Europe is the continent's lost "cultural home," having produced Sigmund Freud, Edmund Husserl, and Franz Kafka (all Jewish, he notes: "What are the Jews if not … *the* small nation par excellence?"), as well as Hermann Broch and Robert Musil. As Europe no longer considers itself "a cultural unity," but rather an economic and governmental one, Central Europe becomes "nothing but a political regime." Czechoslovakia and its neighbors are then classified as part of Eastern Europe. It's almost as though Central European countries have to keep auditioning for a role they already hold.

These two statements, delivered sixteen years apart, represent a compelling and coherent worldview: a defense of the small cultures of Central Europe, and an insistence on their importance to Western Europe. The later essay, the historian Pierre Nora writes in his introduction, "played a decisive role in the formation of French intellectuals" in the Eighties and Nineties and may have encouraged the eastward expansion of the European Union. Both the speech and the article continue to offer insight into contemporary debates, but there is much here with which one might disagree. Kundera, though staunchly Eurocentric, acknowledges that "in Central European revolts there is something conservative, nearly anachronistic: they are desperately trying to restore the past … the past of the modern era." But we should welcome the context he gives for the struggles between Russia and Europe, and the plight of those caught between them. His defense of small languages, small cultures, and small nations feels pressing.

Marcel Proust might well be the exemplar of Kundera's "past of the modern era": the excitement with which scholars continue to pore over his work seems an exhilarating vestige of a time when literature mattered. **THE SEVENTY-FIVE FOLIOS AND OTHER UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPTS** (Belknap, $29.95), now available in a fine translation by Sam Taylor, marks a major discovery in the field of Proust studies. Nathalie Mauriac Dyer, a Proust scholar and the great-granddaughter of Marcel's brother, Robert, edited the book and provides compelling commentary throughout.

The French publisher Bernard de Fallois claimed in 1954 to have read these early drafts of *In Search of Lost Time,* but they remained unseen until his death in 2018. The folios published in Paris three years later represent the first pages of the major twentieth-century novel, Jean-Yves Tadié writes in the preface, "even if they are the last to reach us." Dating from 1907, they include initial versions, "at once strange and familiar," of essential scenes and themes from the book, among them Maman's goodnight kiss, the two paths from the village of Combray (Swann's way and the Guermantes way, which we learn was first called the Villebon), and the narrator's fascination with the girls at the seaside. Proust refers to his mother and his grandmother by their names, Jeanne and Adèle, confirming suspicions about the novel's autobiographical material. Moreover, the character of Charles Swann doesn't yet exist, though we can see the source in Proust's maternal great-uncle, Lazard Baruch Weil, who wasn't Jewish in the original version. "Proust was no more likely to write about a Jewish family from the French bourgeoisie than he was to give his hero his own sexual preferences," Mauriac Dyer explains. Writing during a time when anti-Semitic sentiment in France was high, Proust chose to make a friend of the narrator's family Jewish, rather than his own family.

For those interested in understanding Proust's masterpiece in its social, historical, or autobiographical context, this book is indispensable, and raises questions about the constraints of the period, and how Proust's queerness and Jewishness have been treated. For those interested in the process of literary revision, the folios are equally interesting: we can see how two characters merge into one over time; how Marcel's bedroom was initially described as "hostile" during the goodnight kiss scene, and how this adjective would ultimately attach itself to the hotel room at Balbec, the bedroom becoming a "banal, familiar place." Comparing the folios to the published version as well as other drafts illuminates the processes of synthesis, transference, and accretion that ultimately transform a series of events into Proust's narrative. The folios "belong to the novel, even if they are not yet 'a' novel," Mauriac Dyer writes. The "highly organized system of preparations and echoes, rhymes and reminders," that structure *In Search of Lost Time* "was the result of about fifteen years of patient composition."

Though they can't offer the contrapuntal pleasures of the seven-volume book, you can get a sense here of the whole. In one of the drafts, Marcel's younger brother has gone missing before a portrait session and is found "tenderly caressing" his pet goat "with one hand, kissing it on its pure and slightly red nose, like some small, horned, blotchy-faced dandy." Along the river path of Swann's way is a big lilac bush "in its flower bed where it would exaggeratedly and endlessly shiver at the slightest breath of wind, showing off the great distinction of its manners." At the hotel in Balbec, he recalls one girl he yearned to befriend. She has

> long red hair that floated in the wind behind her, and a hat in the form of a seagull with wings outstretched, which seemed to be just as much a part of her person as her pure nose or her pale eyes that stared as she rode past, but the way the eyes of a seagull might stare into ours, without the slightest awareness of us.

Even in these early sketches, his prose dazzles and thrills, by turns depicting recognition and wonder, sometimes overdone but always with the precise intelligence, meditation, and humor for which Proust is renowned.

Ever urbane, Proust attends to style, and creates of it, as in the description above, significance: the girl's hat resembles a seagull's wings, her eyes a bird's eyes, thus she appears to the reader soaring and cold. As the London-based psychoanalyst Anouchka Grose says in her delicious and substantive new

Photograph of a bedroom in the Marcel Proust Museum © Masha Pryven/akg-images

book **FASHION: A MANIFESTO** (Notting Hill Editions, $21.95), “your clothes are basically a form of externalised, visible thinking.” What you choose to wear is a way of projecting your persona onto the outside world, though “fashion repeatedly teaches us that you can’t please all people all of the time … Whatever you wear, someone will always hate you for it. Even if that person is just you.”

Grose’s wry tone makes her manifesto a joy, but this small book (enticingly produced, with pink cloth covers) has a serious intent. In light of fashion’s egregious role in the climate emergency, Grose wants to change our approach—to revise it—so that we may retain our abiding joy in clothes without further destroying the planet. Within the first paragraph, she lays out several bleak facts. “The clothing industry accounts for 10 per cent of the world’s carbon emissions, while flying contributes a mere 2.4 per cent,” she writes. “Clothing production is also responsible for 20 per cent of the world’s wastewater.” But how can we reconcile this with memories of “days when the seasonal influx of new shapes, colours and textures into the luminous paradises of H&M, Topshop and Miss Selfridge seemed a cause for celebration and joy”?

Grose proceeds to demystify fashion, beginning with theories of its origins (chief among them an anxious aristocracy attempting to distinguish itself from urbanizing lower classes). She also addresses the competition, desire, and paranoia that “flummox us into submission” when we choose what to wear. She casually (and lucidly) brings together Jacques Lacan and horror films, Georges Bataille and Marie Kondo. She points out things you may not have realized you knew: in the past, “thanks to the restrictions placed on women’s agency, fashion became a space in which one could distinguish oneself, or even innovate, without threatening the social order.” The status quo wasn’t just unaffected, it was reinforced. If fashion was “an arena in which women were allowed to show off, then it also meant that men could show off their women.” A woman’s “cinched waists, crinolines, hobble skirts or uncomfortable shoes” were symbols of the bind she was in.

But what is the message of her manifesto? How should the fashion landscape be revised? She doesn’t quite answer this question. Eager not to “recast the symptoms,” she claims to offer a “new, non-bossy kind” of manifesto. For the reader who has long kept an eye on trends, this may feel like being released into the wild. Grose’s final chapter suggests that the solution to the crisis is to encourage individual choice and reject Big Fashion. No absolutes exist in her merciful vision, except for “no red vinyl” (prescriptive, but correct). “Let your clothes be chatty and comfortable, whatever comfort means to you. Affirm your own sartorial sovereignty. Challenge everything,” she advises. And crucially, understand that “the future of fashion is already in your wardrobe.” ■

Top: *Lilac Bush,* 1889, by Vincent Van Gogh. Courtesy the Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg
Bottom, left to right: “I leave my wings…,” by Mario Giacomelli © Simone Giacomelli. Courtesy of Mario Giacomelli Archive. “Fashion 10, for the *New York Times*, 1997,” by Sarah Moon © The artist

SIGNS AND WONDERS

Charles Portis and the art of getting out in time

By Will Stephenson

Discussed in this essay:

Collected Works, by Charles Portis. Library of America. 1,105 pages. $45.

Not long before Charles Portis visited Buckingham Palace in the summer of 1964, having secured a rare invitation to "Her Majesty's Afternoon Party," he found himself in a one-bedroom apartment getting summarily hammered with a group of foreign correspondents. Portis was by then mostly inured to the aura of celebrity. Born in 1933, he'd been raised along the southern border of Arkansas, in that region one of his narrators calls "the Arklatex"—where Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas converge—before serving in the Korean War. He'd spent stretches of his earliest years in journalism trailing Elvis and Martin Luther King Jr. As the London bureau chief of the *New York Herald Tribune,* he'd already interviewed Marlon Brando and reported from the set of *Goldfinger.* The queen, though, was something else. "I began to wonder about protocol," he later recalled. "Better be careful here."

His time in London had been marked by noxious and near-constant concerns over protocol. He resented the city's bureaucracy, its weather, the tailored suit jacket he wore every day to work. "He never liked London from day one," his friend and former colleague at the *Arkansas Gazette* Roy Reed would later remember. "It was cold, damp, and the people were pretentious." Added to this was his growing contempt for the institution of journalism itself, and consequently for other journalists. "I must have thought it would be fun and not very hard," he once said of his decision to study journalism. "Something like barber college—not to offend the barbers. They probably provide a more useful service." His low opinion of his own field, not historically all that uncommon, developed early. As he put it in a column for the *Gazette* when he was only twenty-four, "Show me a reporter and I'll show you an arrested cretin."

On this particular night in London, Portis and the others were playing cards in a room thick with smoke. One of the men leaned forward and showed off a trick in which he placed a lit cigarette on the end of his tongue, rolled it back into his mouth, and appeared to swallow it. Then he opened his mouth, stuck out his tongue, and revealed the still-lit cigarette—good as new. (The move would later make an appearance in Portis's 1991 novel *Gringos.*) With bravado and boozy confidence, Portis placed his own cigarette on his tongue, leaned his head back, and tried folding it in, only to land the lit cherry on the tip of his nose, where it smoldered for a few moments before he shook it free.

The day of the queen's party arrived. "It was unusually warm, in the high 70's," Portis wrote of the afternoon in a column for the paper. Among the attendees were various lords and cabinet ministers, the silent-film star Douglas Fairbanks, and of course the queen herself, in a "light blue dress and hat." The guests wandered the royal grounds drinking tea and lemonade and admiring the flowers and pink flamingos by the lake. Rather than mingle with the dignitaries, Portis spent his time neurotically fixated on his nose, which was clownishly swollen and singed red. "By holding my head down 10 or 15 degrees, the toasted place was not too noticeable," he wrote, anticipating in a germinal way the kind of peculiar specificity and impassive humor that would become hallmarks of his fiction. "But that posture looked strange, and it made my eyes tired from looking up. I would just have to make the best of it." Having spoken to no one, he eventually hailed a cab and went home.

It wasn't long after the nose-burning incident that Portis decided to go home for good, all the way back to Arkansas. To say enough with London, celebrities, and newspapers. Tom Wolfe, with whom he'd shared a newsroom in the *Tribune*'s New York office, later wrote that "Portis quit cold one day; just like that, without a warning." This was in a piece on the birth of the New Journalism, for which he cited Portis as forerunner and inspiration, in no small part for the sheer fortitude he demonstrated in actually leaving: "It was too goddamned perfect to be true, and yet there it was." Portis would later deny having played a role in any such movement. "Mine, alas, was the old, dreary journalism," he wrote to a reader. But his London writings, including the Buckingham Palace dispatch and even stranger fare—a piece on UFO culture, for instance, a topic that would recur in his fiction—suggest otherwise. Nora Ephron, whom he briefly dated in New York, wrote that he "was no good at all at writing the formulaic, voiceless, unbylined stories with strict line counts," something that should come as no surprise to those familiar with his work, which is richly idiomatic and utterly distinctive.

Roy Reed framed Portis's decision, which baffled him at the time (the "best newspaper job in the world," Reed called it—a position once occupied by Karl Marx), as a conflict between impulses toward fiction and non-fiction. "One day, I think, the quarrel between the two parts of his mind became too much," Reed wrote in his memoir. And so Portis "set off to spend the rest of his life just making it up."

I moved to Arkansas because Atlanta was too hot, and my house there was infested with ants. There were probably other reasons, but these are the ones that have stuck with me most forcefully. I packed my

Will Stephenson is a senior editor at Harper's Magazine.

car and drove all day and stayed for several years, though the car didn't last very long—I wrecked it on an especially icy night that first winter, having never before driven in snow. I got a job at an alt-weekly newspaper, where I wrote stories about Arkansas for people who lived in Arkansas. I interviewed professional wrestlers, meth cooks, tow-truck drivers. I spent much of my time thinking about how I might sometime, eventually, when I got around to it, quit.

Quitting the paper, as Wolfe pointed out, has always been the most common and wonderful fantasy for journalists. It's all the other projects you talk about finding time for in bars after work. It's everything outside your window. An editor at the paper where I worked once quit to write fiction at a cheap lake house he'd found in a small town called Greers Ferry. His wife was a painter and they made do without internet; they just worked. I was awestruck. As Wolfe put it, shocked by Portis's dedication to geographic isolation: "A *fishing* shack! In *Arkansas*!"

The late Paul Hemphill, a Southern newspaper legend who like Portis was born in the Thirties and left journalism in the Sixties to write books, wrote what is perhaps the definitive account of this foundational urge. He called his essay "Quitting the Paper," and led with an epigraph from Hemingway: "Newspaper work will not harm a young writer and will help him if he gets out of it in time." That "in time" is the tough part, though, because how do you know for sure when you're there? Can you feel it in some physiological sense, when your mind goes and your writing begins to atrophy? Hemphill suggests you can, and goes even further. "Most of us are inviting suicide or alcoholism or early senility if we continue to labor for too long at a newspaper," he writes, "thinking we are going to uncover corruption and change the system, because most newspapers themselves are tidy, model plantations."

For Portis, then, it was simply time, time to quit the thing he'd always been best at and had nevertheless recently begun to despise. "I do not fool around with newspapers," he'd have the narrator of his most famous novel, *True Grit,* say just a few years later. "The paper editors are great ones for reaping where they have not sown."

I lived in Little Rock just off 17th Street, a few blocks away from Portis's early home in the city—a place he referred to, obscurely, as "the house of abandoned neckties"—and I shared a more than slightly aspirational affinity with the writer who had, I liked to think, paid his dues in the same manner as I was then paying them. (It was during this time that I came across his London journalism, including the column about the queen, while digging around in the archives of local papers where he'd been syndicated.) The area, known as the Quapaw Quarter, was dotted with Victorian and Colonial Revival mansions

Illustration by Nicole Rifkin

built in the nineteenth century and long since divided up into cheap apartments. Nearby was Mount Holly Cemetery, where the Imagist poet John Gould Fletcher was buried in 1950. Portis lived in one of these huge, crumbling houses on 21st Street, right off Main, which used to be a thoroughfare and is now perpetually under construction, always on its way back. Farther up, there is a catfish restaurant that claims to have remained essentially unchanged for more than a century. It's hard not to get hung up on history there, because everything in Little Rock is so transitional, incomplete both in its progress and in its decline. Nothing entirely succeeds, but nothing entirely fails either.

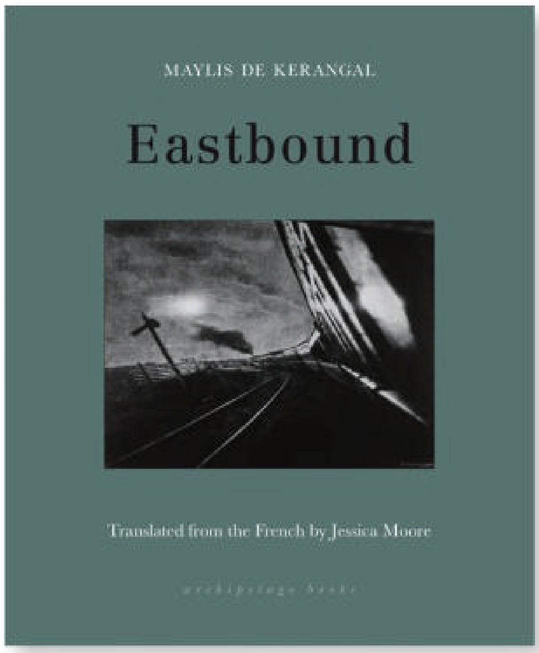
If Portis was not "our least-known great novelist," as Ron Rosenbaum once claimed in *Esquire,* he was certainly among our least photographed. Remembered mostly as the author of *True Grit*—his only period piece, a western, something that can lead certain misguided fans to make a big show of setting it apart from the rest—he was, up until the time of his death in February 2020, typically grouped with such celebrated literary recluses as Cormac McCarthy, Thomas Pynchon, Harper Lee, and J. D. Salinger. Not as celebrated as these others, but all the more aggressively championed by his admirers on that account. He infamously allowed a *New York Times* reporter to fly down to Little Rock to interview him for a profile, only to declare the entire conversation off the record. The writer Paul Theroux once secured a meeting with him for his travelogue *Deep South,* and came away from the encounter with a single quote: "Be careful." A decade ago, the British magazine *The Spectator* gave its review of one of his books the absurd and long-winded title, "There's so much mystery around Charles Portis that we're not even clear whether he's alive."

The cult-writer epithet, in truth, has begun to seem like a bit of a distraction, even an anachronism. It's the sort of thing that can put people off the scent, most people being understandably wary of cults. Portis's former colleague (and mine) Ernest Dumas said on the occasion of the author's death that he had "an almost Jonestown-like following," but of how many twentieth-century novelists (or novelists of any period) can this be said? And anyway, how many dedicated readers can be deemed sufficient to elevate one above this sort of designation these days? At what point, in other words, does a cult become a readership? Portis's five novels have each been reissued more than once in my lifetime—to say nothing of the Coen Brothers' 2010 adaptation of *True Grit,* nominated for ten Academy Awards—and now comes the canon-affirming Library of America collection, which comprises all five as well as a selection of the journalism and miscellany included in *Escape Velocity,* a 2012 anthology compiled by the Little Rock writer Jay Jennings, who has edited this volume as well. I'd say this would put the whole "cult" business to bed, but I tend to doubt it.

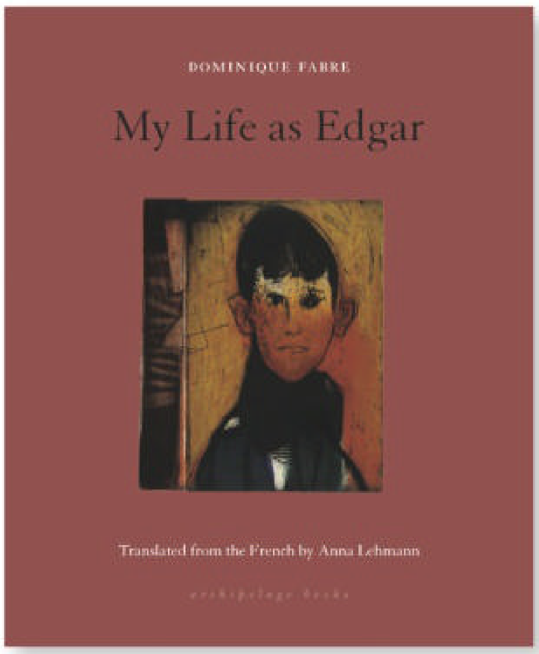
Portis was a commercial success from the very start of his career as a fiction writer. His first two novels, *Norwood* and *True Grit,* published in 1966 and 1968, were both serialized in the *Saturday Evening Post* and quickly adapted into Hollywood films (both starring Glen Campbell and Kim Darby, though the latter film is best remembered for winning John Wayne his only Oscar). The books mirror each other in certain ways—both involve a rambling quest from a small town (Ralph, Texas, and Yell County, Arkansas, respectively) to see about a grievance (a debt unpaid, a father murdered). The venture out and the return home: this was Portis's own life's arc, and it is his standard mode—the only exception being *Masters of Atlantis,* which can meander as a result, if pleasantly so. For the most part, his characters follow the "restlesse motions" described by Sir Thomas Browne in the epigraph to *The Dog of the South*: "He that would behold a very anomalous motion, may observe it in the Tortile and tiring stroaks of Gnatworms."

And just as "recluse," as Pynchon once said, can be code for "doesn't like to talk to reporters," so too can "cult writer" be code for "doesn't live in New York." After his fishing-shack sojourn, Little Rock would remain Portis's home for the rest of his life—"as much as I can call anyplace home," he clarified to a Memphis newspaper in a rare interview after *True Grit*'s release. "I guess I don't really have one." His regional association can confuse this point. In fact, Portis spent years living out of his truck, as well as in trailers and motels and non-descript apartment complexes. He spent a substantial portion of each year in Mexico. Even *True Grit* was written, he said, in a village about two hundred miles north of Mexico City; he seemed to consider San Miguel de Allende a kind of second home. His books are as much about being away from Arkansas as they are about being there. *The Dog of the South* and *Gringos* are both set predominantly south of the border, *Norwood* draws on his fish-out-of-water experience of living in New York (and traveling the country), and *True Grit*'s action takes place largely in the Choctaw Nation, present-day Oklahoma; it is a journey into the past and into historical research, his serious commitment to which is everywhere in evidence in the non-fiction pieces included in this book.

When he was in town, Portis could generally be found at the bar—the Faded Rose, say, or the Town Pump. I remember going to the latter and half expecting to see Portis on a stool, though he'd been diagnosed with Alzheimer's the year before I arrived. I could only speculate, then, as to the autobiographical content of a sentence like this one, from *The Dog of the South*: "When the beer came, I dipped a finger in it and wet down each corner of the paper napkin to anchor it, so it would not come up with the mug each time and make me appear ridiculous." I can imagine the sort of characters he'd meet at the Town Pump, though, because it is impossible not to meet them there. I recall one late night an older gentleman, in his cups long enough to have become despondent, seizing the karaoke mic to perform a warbling, truly moving rendition of Jack Greene's country standard "Statue of a Fool" *consider becoming a member: archipelagobooks.org/support*


MAYLIS DE KERANGAL
Eastbound
Translated from the French by Jessica Moore
archipelago books

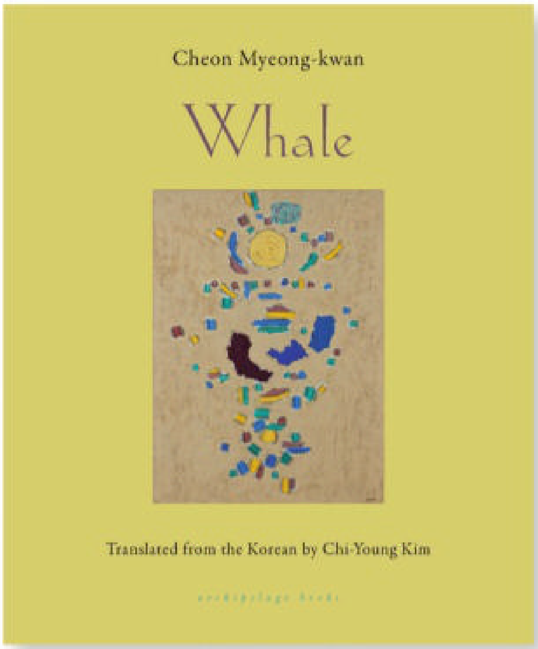
In Maylis de Kerangal's luminous vision, conveyed by the inspired translator Jessica Moore, Siberia's immensity dwarfs human perspective … In a time of war, this connection may bring liberation and salvation.
—Ken Kalfus, *New York Times*


DOMINIQUE FABRE
My Life as Edgar
Translated from the French by Anna Lehmann
archipelago books

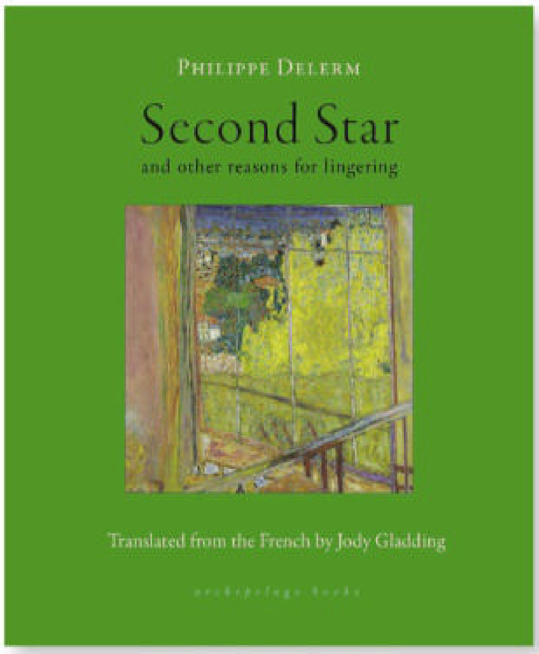
The strong, intimate voice of this gentle, canny narrator continues to stay with us long after we reach the end of *The Waitress Was New* – what an engrossing, captivating tale.
—Lydia Davis on *The Waitress Was New*

NEW IN PAPERBACK
Claude Ponti
My Valley
Claude Ponti
HĪZNOBYŪTĪ
Translated from the French by Alyson Waters

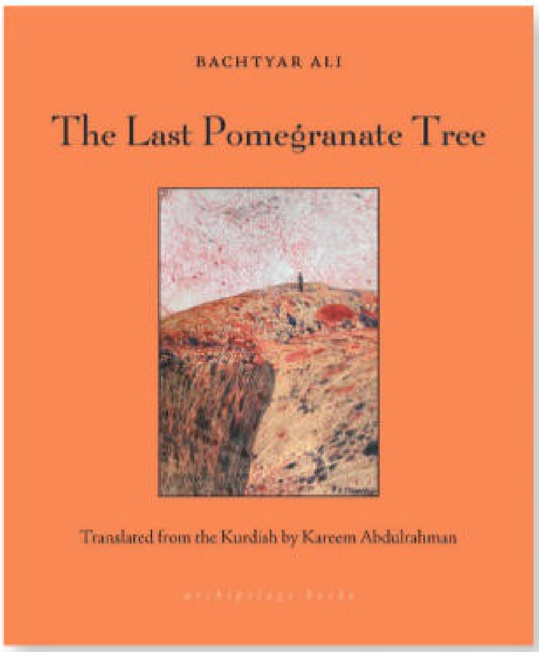
I don't see a lot of books like this one. Which is to say, stories for a range of ages that serve the sole purpose of transporting you somewhere new … Awe-inspiring … A jaw-dropper worth discovering.
—Betsy Bird, *School Library Journal*


Cheon Myeong-kwan
Whale
Translated from the Korean by Chi-Young Kim
archipelago books

Told in an omniscient and playful narrative voice … This is a distinctly Korean take on *Great Expectations*, a tale of aspiration and folly punctuated with artisanal bricks and dried fish.
—Christian House, *Financial Times*


PHILIPPE DELERM
Second Star
and other reasons for lingering
Translated from the French by Jody Gladding
archipelago books

Delerm's beautiful book of brief meditations reminds us that lingering, observing, noticing, wondering – about a gesture on the soccer pitch; visitors to the public piano; oneself interacting with others – is one of the ways our lives become meaningful.
—Ross Gay


BACHTYAR ALI
The Last Pomegranate Tree
Translated from the Kurdish by Kareem Abdulrahman
archipelago books

A tour de force … The urban scenes contribute to the author's in-the-round portrait of his homeland, showing us more than bunkers and bomb craters, suggesting fertility and possibility … Isn't it a fine novel that sustains such counterpoint?
—John Domini, *Brooklyn Rail*

archipelago books

www.archipelagobooks.org • www.elsewhereeditions.org

distributed to the trade by Penguin Random House

("Somewhere there should be for all the world to see/A statue of a fool made of stone"). He removed the mic from its stand and stepped off the stage to walk among us in the barroom, still singing, with the affect of a Pentecostal minister.

I have called *Masters of Atlantis* an exception in the Portis oeuvre, but in the way of such things it is also a kind of skeleton key. The book chronicles the rise and fall of the Gnomon Society, based on its protagonist Lamar Jimmerson's chance encounter, in France after the First World War, with a beggar who gives him a copy of the *Codex Pappus,* an allegedly ancient book that "had been sealed in an ivory casket in Atlantis many thousands of years ago, and committed to the waves on that terrible day when the rumbling began." From this text, Jimmerson elaborates—with a great deal of imagination—a mystic worldview and belief system incorporating elements from Freemasonry, Hermeticism, Scientology, and any number of other similarly esoteric pursuits, many of which did flourish in this country in the middle-twentieth century.

"Mr. Portis has chosen to write about a subject that apparently does not interest him much," wrote a *New York Times* critic when the book was published, but I'd contend that the opposite is true—all of his novels are suffused with references to secret societies and fraternal organizations, to "signs and wonders," the Elks Lodge and the Kiwanis Club, Masons and UFO cults, VFW halls and meetings of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. "*Everything is a cube,*" repeats one character, cryptically, in *Gringos.* ("I don't know what he had in mind," the protagonist admits. "When you get right down to it everything is not a cube. You can look around and see that.") Even the murdered father of *True Grit*'s Mattie Ross had been a Freemason, "buried in his Mason's apron by the Danville lodge."

One is constantly confronted, in Portis's work, with the glories and horrors of the Old South—from the restless motions of de Soto and Cortés to the great battles of the Civil War and the Mexican Revolution, all the way through to the last generation to buy into Henry Grady's vision of a New South, those men of industry and competence from the era preceding Portis's own. "We are weaker than our fathers," one of his characters (who has recently quit his job at a newspaper) says to his nemesis in a moment of despair. The old ways are always being contrasted with present-day American banality, with the encroachment of chintzy commercial culture even into the hinterlands. This flattening, atomizing force is what seemingly accounts for Portis's preoccupation with Gnomon-esque guilds and other such flimsy attempts at restoring enchantment and community to a culture that has lost all meaningful trace of either.

"For more than a century now," Portis wrote in a 1999 essay for *The Atlantic* (which was edited at the time by his old *Gazette* colleague William Whitworth), "southern editorial writers have been seeing portents in the night skies and proclaiming The End of the War, at Long Last, and the blessed if somewhat tardy arrival of The New South." This term, he explained, they generally use "to mean something the same as, culturally identical with, at one with, the rest of the country." He goes on: "Then there is the new and alien splendor to be seen all about us, in cities with tall, dark, and featureless glass towers." His is a temperamentally conservative vision, in which youth culture—hippies and beatniks, "kids gone feral," kids who never fought in a war and lack respect for their elders—is an absurd and pathetic sort of menace. Where this could easily become curmudgeonly or censorious in a less imaginative writer, however, Portis always seems bemused; the disappointment is too vast to be taken all that seriously, it is foregone and always cut with an instinctual swerve toward the comic. In a piece he wrote for the publication I worked for, the *Arkansas Times,* part travelogue and part historical meditation on the Ouachita River and its environs, he fails to learn anything of substance from even those youth who still live there: "The girl behind the bar knew nothing, which was all right," he writes at one point. "You don't expect young people to know river lore."

Nor do you expect them to know even the most basic things a person of his age had known—proficiency in automobile maintenance, for instance, the importance of which to Portis's sensibility I don't have to speculate about and couldn't possibly exaggerate. "You couldn't trust a sixteen-year-old kid in the States these days to look after a goldfish," one of his narrators laments. Portis had apprenticed at a Chevrolet dealership as a teenager, and was a lifelong shade-tree mechanic, like most of his protagonists—from Norwood Pratt to Jimmy Burns, with whom he shared a vehicle (a white Chevrolet truck). *The Dog of the South,* another road novel, contains fourteen references to its narrator's transmission alone, and one chapter in *Gringos* opens with the indelible stoic maxim, "You put things off and then one morning you wake up and say—today I will change the oil in my truck."

His family, he has said, were "talkers rather than readers or writers. A lot of cigar smoke and laughing when my father and his brothers got together. Long anecdotes. The spoken word." He still remembered, when he wrote the *Atlantic* memoir, seeing his great-grandfather at family reunions, a man who had fought in an unofficial militia during the Civil War, like Rooster Cogburn, accused in *True Grit* of having fought with the guerrilla group Quantrill's Raiders. That's how close Portis was to this history—he had touched it and spoken to it.

A further word on *True Grit*: Portis's mother was a frequent correspondent for local newspapers, and one of his early jobs in journalism was editing dispatches from older women in rural corners of the state—"country correspondence" from "lady stringers," as he put it in an oral history of the *Gazette.* "My job was to edit out all the life and charm from these homely reports," he said. "Some fine old country expression, or a nice turn of phrase—out they went. We probably thought we were doing the readers a favor." *True Grit*, then, could be seen as a kind of offer in recompense, a tribute to these women and their stern elegance. The complexity of its narration is understated and can be missed. It is not simply, as Mattie Ross concludes, "my true account of how I avenged Frank Ross's blood over in the Choctaw Nation when snow was on the ground." It is an older woman's inevitably warped memory of her childhood, injecting her mannerisms and intelligence into a younger self. "She isn't as bright as the old lady makes her out," as Portis said to the Memphis paper.

Of course, all of his narrators and protagonists are unreliable—except for his last, *Gringos* being the closest he came to realizing his dream of writing a Ross MacDonald noir—this is the source of much of their humor. And humor isn't only a byproduct in his novels, it is their universal joint, their clutch assembly (to haphazardly borrow metaphors). As an antimodern, he responded to the new with weary cynicism and ecstatic embodiments of those pitiable, fascinating characters who can't go along, who scheme and fail and scheme again to find a place in the order of things. His description of his family gatherings—"Long anecdotes. The spoken word"—can't be bested as an account of his own work, which thrives on surreally precise digressions and long stretches of dialogue in which characters disregard or talk past one another.

This is especially true of a certain kind of secondary character he excelled at creating—the bloviating, irrepressibly self-interested (and self-regarding) showman, a term I'll use in place of "con artist" because the degree to which they are aware of their own fabulations and delusions can vary, and might even be unimportant. In *Norwood* there is Grady Fring the Kredit King, who, aside from life insurance and trafficking in stolen goods, has

> a good many business interests. I'm also in mobile homes and coin-operated machines. I am a licensed private investigator in three states. We have a debt collection agency in Texarkana. I know you've heard of our car lots over there.

In *The Dog of the South* there is the Demerol-addled, disgraced Dr. Reo Symes, whose life story threatens beautifully to overtake the book's ostensible plot. As the narrator recounts, after one of Symes's many soliloquies,

> I learned that he had been dwelling in the shadows for several years. He had sold hi-lo shag carpet remnants and velvet paintings from the back of a truck in California. He had sold wide shoes by mail.... He had sold gladiola bulbs and vitamins for men and fat-melting pills and all-purpose hooks and hail-damaged pears. He had picked up small fees counseling veterans on how to fake chest pains so as to gain immediate admission to V.A. hospitals and a free week in bed. He had sold ranchettes in Colorado and unregistered securities in Arkansas.

(It is notoriously ill-advised to try and explain humor, so I will only pause and reiterate: hail-damaged pears.) In *Masters of Atlantis*, there is Austin Popper, who has a talking blue jay named Squanto and broadens the appeal of Gnomonism by removing much of its complexity (and triangles), before vanishing to perform fruitless alchemical experiments in the Colorado scrublands.

One of my earliest assignments in Little Rock was to cover a gala at the governor's mansion that was being held in Portis's honor. He wasn't present, though autographed copies of his books were crudely auctioned off and a number of Arkansas politicians who seemed clearly and sometimes comically unfamiliar with his work spoke on his behalf. Last among them was the governor himself, Mike Beebe, who seemed at first unaware that an event was going to be held at his home at all. "I never met John Wayne," he said when called upon to speak. "But I recently shared the stage with Jeff Bridges."

Portis showed a particular attention, in his novels and non-fiction, to legacies and ruins. "These dead cities still lived and sparkled for him in the distance as they did not for me," the narrator of *Gringos* admits. Later, looking at an assortment of

CREATIVE UNCERTAINTY:
A New Philosophy for a World Out of Balance, by David Keppel. Kindle and paperback.

Ed school mediocrity
is the manifest reality in
"Education Fads versus Individual Rights"
on the web.

ADVERTISE YOUR BOOK HERE
New discounted rate for authors

HARPER'S
JUNE

IN-HOUSE DESIGN INCLUDES
title, subtitle, author, ISBN, price, genre, availability, summary up to 30 words, and book cover

For rates and information, please contact Perri Smith at (212) 420-5773 or perri@harpers.org

H
$35
LIBERTY WITHOUT LABOR
Harper's Magazine large canvas tote bag
STORE.HARPERS.ORG

DISCLAIMER: Harper's Magazine assumes no liability for the content of or reply to any personal advertisement. The advertiser assumes complete liability for the content of and all replies to any advertisement and for any claims made against Harper's Magazine as a result thereof. The advertiser agrees to indemnify and hold Harper's Magazine and its employees harmless from all costs, expenses (including reasonable attorney fees), liabilities, and damages resulting from or caused by the publication placed by the advertiser or any reply to any such advertisement.

ransacked monuments, he calls them "blank tombstones" and "memorials to nothing." Two of his books involve mysterious trunks filled with material that might theoretically fill in the gaps of the misunderstood lives of their tragic owners. *True Grit* ends with the exhumation and relocation of a body, and with the installment of a newer, more fitting tombstone. Another character in *Gringos* announces, while trekking through the jungle:

> I mean to lie down out here and die where I was happiest. Please don't interfere. I will just lie down under the canopy of the trees. With my old empty heart. I will die and melt away and be with all the other forgotten things in the earth.

His brother Richard has spoken of another novel that was never published, something about a "chiropractor who has this psychiatric hospital somewhere outside of Veracruz." What became of it? Maybe it's locked away in a trunk somewhere. Failing its posthumous appearance, the Library of America collection is likely to stand as the "complete" Portis. I wish it had included some of the London journalism I came across all those years ago, but this is a minor quibble—no one could say it does not do justice to his writing life. Whether it will allow him to shake the "cult" qualifier remains to be seen.

One of my last assignments in Little Rock was to write about the death of a blind, homeless man who claimed to have been close friends with Yoko Ono. I visited a tent encampment behind a grocery store, where he had frequently stayed. The ground had recently been clear-cut and bulldozed—I could hear the sounds of distant chainsaws. Two men, former residents themselves, were sitting in lawn chairs on the edge of the field, watching the emptiness and destruction with blank expressions. I sat with them for a while. I asked, at a certain juncture, what they were doing there anyway, why they were watching this place that was now a hollow and would soon probably be a bank or self-storage units or a fast-food restaurant. "There's nothing wrong with sittin' right here," one of them said calmly over the clatter, and the other nodded. "It's peaceful, man."

I thought then and think now that there wasn't much Portis needed to invent about this place. A couple of weeks later I quit the paper finally and left Arkansas for good. ■

April Index Sources

1 Delaware State Chamber of Commerce (Wilmington); **2** Tax Policy Center (Washington); **3–5** WalletHub (Miami); **6,7** Department of State; **8,9** National Bureau of Economic Research (Cambridge, Mass.); **10** U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; **11,12** Federal Trade Commission; **13** Textio (Seattle); **14** Gallup (Washington); **15** American Psychological Association (Washington); **16** Securities and Exchange Commission; **17** AlphaSense (NYC); **18** Visier (Vancouver, British Columbia); **19** Payscale (Seattle); **20** Gallup; **21** Fishbowl (San Francisco); **22** Study.com (Mountain View, Calif.); **23,24** Pew Research Center (Washington); **25,26** American Enterprise Institute (Washington); **27–30** Pew Research Center; **31–34** Eitan Hersh, Tufts University (Medford, Mass.); **35** Gallup; **36** YouGov (NYC); **37** IBISWorld (Los Angeles); **38,39** Gallup; **40** Pew Research Center.

***Harper's Magazine* is owned and published monthly by the Harper's Magazine Foundation, 666 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10012. Tel: 212-420-5720. Jackson Lears, Chairman; John R. MacArthur, President; Andrew J. Bacevich, Rosa Brooks, and Rosanna Warren, Board Members.** Copyright © 2023 by the Harper's Magazine Foundation. All rights reserved. The trademark *Harper's* is used by the Harper's Magazine Foundation under license and is a registered trademark owned by HarperCollins. The trademark *Harper's Index* is a registered trademark owned by the Harper's Magazine Foundation. Printed in the United States. Periodicals postage paid at New York, N.Y., and additional mailing offices. In Canada, second-class postage paid at Windsor, Ont. In Canada, International Publications Mail Agreement #40013802. Canadian GST 12477 4167 RT. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to *Harper's Magazine*, P.O. Box 885, Markham Station Main, Markham, Ont. L3P8M9. POSTMASTER: Send all address changes to *Harper's*, P.O. Box 6237, Harlan, Iowa 51593-1737. ISSN0017-789X. CHANGE OF ADDRESS: Please provide both address from last issue and new address. Allow six weeks' advance notice. SUBSCRIPTIONS: $30 one year. Canada and United States possessions, add $3; other foreign, add $20 per year. Send orders to *Harper's Magazine*, P.O. Box 6237, Harlan, Iowa 51593-1737. **SUBSCRIPTION PROBLEMS: Write *Harper's Magazine*, P.O. Box 6237, Harlan, Iowa 51593-1737, or call 800-444-4653, M–F, 8 AM–midnight, S&S, 9 AM–7 PM, EST.** All requests for PERMISSIONS and REPRINTS must be made in writing to *Harper's Magazine*, 666 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10012. The Readings in *Harper's Magazine* every month include texts and documents found in the public domain, most of them abridged for reasons of space and not all of them reprinted with permission. *Harper's Magazine* will not consider or return unsolicited non-fiction manuscripts that have not been preceded by a written query, but will consider unsolicited fiction. Unsolicited poetry will not be considered or returned. No queries or manuscripts will be considered unless they are accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Visit our website at www.harpers.org.

ATHENA PHEROMONES™
INCREASE AFFECTION

Created by Winnifred Cutler, Ph.D. in biology from U. of Penn, post-doc Stanford. Co-discovered human pheromones in 1986

Effective for 74% in two 8-week studies, 68% in 3rd study.

FORMULA PROVEN EFFECTIVE IN 3 DOUBLE-BLIND STUDIES

Unscented Fragrance Additives

Athena Pheromones increase your attractiveness. Worn daily lasts 4-6 mos, or use it straight.
Athena 10X™ For Men $99.50
10:13™ For Women $98.50
Cosmetics Free U.S. Shipping

♥ **Pete (IN)** 3 orders "This product is amazing! I have been in sales all my life and **10X is terrific for sales! People want to be around me and spend more time with me.** I know there is a lot of skepticism out there about pheromones, but **your product is the only one with scientific information to back it up. *10X does really work!*"**

SAVE $100 on a 6-Pak
Not in stores 610-827-2200
Athenainstitute.com
Athena Institute, 1211 Braefield Rd., Chester Spgs, PA 19425 HP

FOR CLASSIFIED RATES AND INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:
Perri Smith
perri@harpers.org, (212) 420-5773

TEXT ADS: Minimum ten words.

SPACE RATES: One-inch, $270; Two-inch, $530; 1/12, $650; 1/9, $765. Frequency discounts available.

PLUS COST per word: 1X rate $4.50; 3X rate $4.40; 6X rate $4.30; 9X rate $4.10; 12X rate $4.00. Telephone numbers, box numbers, URLs, and email addresses count as two words. ZIP codes count as one word.

CLOSING DATES: 1st of the 2nd preceding month. For example: August 1st for the October issue.

PAYMENT: Prepayment for all first-time advertisers is required. Make checks payable to Harper's Magazine, and mail to: Harper's Magazine, 666 Broadway, FL 11, New York, NY 10012, Attn: Classifieds. Bank transfer info may be provided upon request. Please include telephone number on all correspondence.

TO RESPOND TO AN AD:
Harper's Magazine
666 Broadway, New York, NY 10012.
Attn: Classifieds

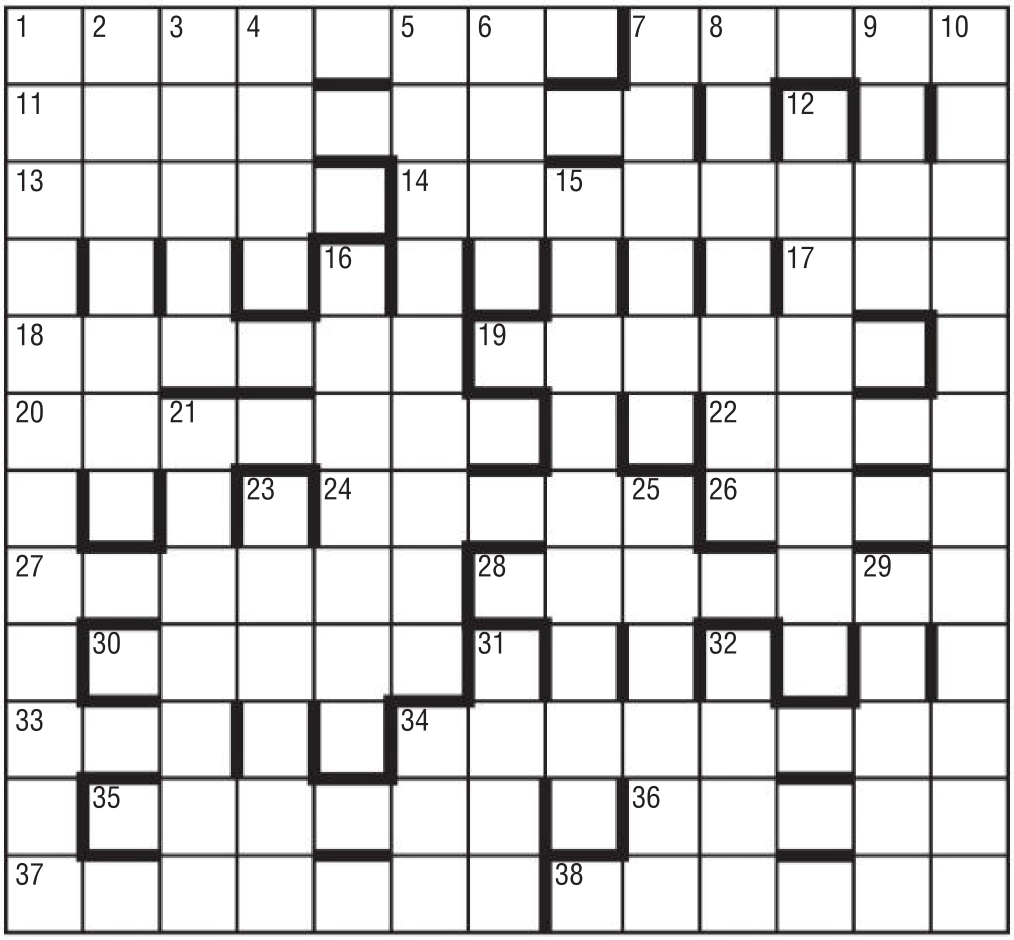
PUZZLE

NO TYPOS

By Richard E. Maltby Jr.
and Barry Stewart Mann

THERE ARE NO TYPOS IN THIS PUZZLE.

There is one capitalized word. 19A, uncommon to some, is also an alternate spelling. As always, mental repunctuation of a clue is the key to its solution. The solution to last month's puzzle appears on page 51.



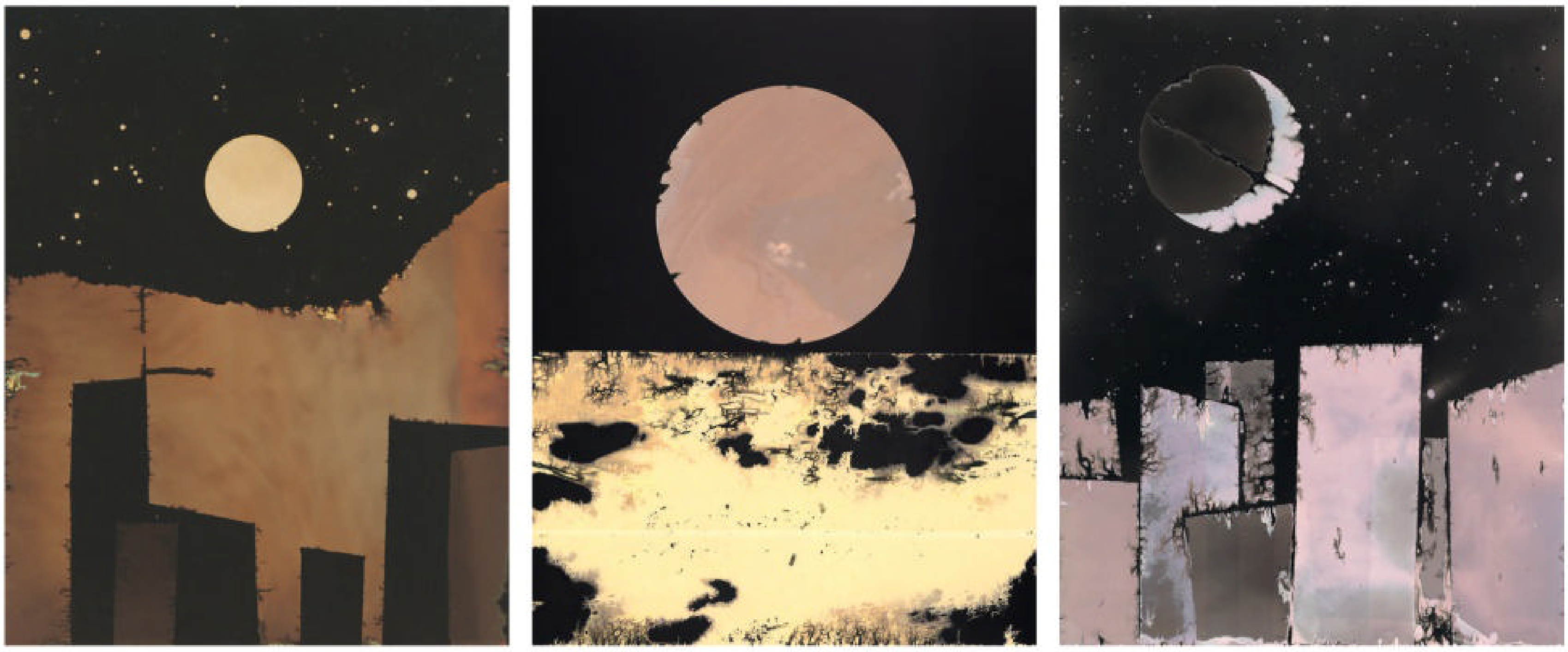
ACROSS

1. Trap set—indeed! Coming back, get totally exited (8)
7. What you might do under the Stars and Strips, traveling west (5)
11. Tele-coder in flight stimulator (9)
13. Country with first great Secretory of the Interior (5)
14. Can't I question what's holding me together? I'm curios (8)
17. Add a drop of tabasco to a center cut of rib eye stake (3)
18. Grasp her excitement—it fits like a globe (6)
19. TOP SECRETED—in riddle (6)
20. Catherine is an art corrector (7)
22. Donna Summer, twice after act, cuts all of the "Last Dunce" (4)
24. One third of Bangor [no typo here], Main (5)
26. Cygnet rings replaced by a penetrating swoon (4)
27. I muted, rebooted, something passed by the Bored (6)
28. Che & Anne interact ridiculously during improve (7)
30. Something stored in a yurt or tent in the dessert (5)
33. 30% of homophobes, meting resistance (3)
34. Nothing gets swallowed by a single stormy petrol (8)
35. "Awl eye needs a change in latitude!" (6)
36. Look into the second half of *Dawson's Greek*, smartie (5)
37. Singer, also starlet, starting out peripherally, land *Stranger Thongs* (7)
38. Seconds from admonishment, reveal scam based on Standard & Pour (6)

DOWN

1. GED to SAT in U.S.—not standardized tastings (12)
2. Faces of Eloise, Little Lulu, Iggy, Peanuts, Superman? Everyone's in the conic section (7)
3. Fruit Lops left in Reformed chapel (5)
4. Collapsible cane is there when one needs zit (4)
5. Marque Zuckerberg's heart is caught up in restructuring, and Meta (5,4)
6. Long time, no C, in scone mix (4)
7. Collared greens, finally making a comeback—that is ultimate character (6)
8. For fifty-one pounds, start to sweep flowers (7)
9. Pet peeve? Nothing odd in that. It's what many foil to understand (4)
10. Populist leader, one among many mail deliverers, receives sixth letter during Valentine Stay (12)
12. Add a touch of Wu-Tang to R&B sound after getting mixed massages (8)
15. Sardines, start to finish, holds up the onset of tooth delay (9)
16. True, I managed with tips of thumb tax (7)
21. Less than 50% of Democrats joined to ban toxic waist (7)
23. Conclusions drawn from playing Atari? Prefer old one-armed banded (6)
25. In Cannes, *The Thing* takes in final installment of bio-pick (6)
29. Later, after a taste of chocolate fugue (5)
31. Start clearing—haphazardly, say—the isles (4)
32. Initialized booting of computer must include left clique (4)
34. Get heads up from Lab, Airedale, Great Dame (3)

Contest Rules: Send completed diagram with name and address to "No Typos," *Harper's Magazine*, 666 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10012. If you already subscribe to *Harper's*, please include a copy of your latest mailing label. Entries must be received by April 11. The sender of the first correct solution opened at random will receive a one-year subscription to *Harper's Magazine* (limit one winner per household per year). The winner's name will be printed in the June issue. The winner of the February puzzle, "Sixes and Sevens (And Twelves)," is Dan Barker, Madison, Wis.



FINDINGS

Toxoplasma gondii infection, which was recently found to increase human facial symmetry and attractiveness, makes Danish women become successful entrepreneurs. Open-label placebos reduce feelings of guilt, and video game loot-box purchases are strongly correlated with problem gambling. Exeter researchers sought gamblers to treat with ketamine, and other Exeter researchers who reared pheasant chicks, trained them on cognitive puzzles, and released them into the wild found that they were likelier to be eaten by foxes near the edges of their home range. A Finnish researcher warned of rising sexual inequality and loneliness in straight men, noting that 5 percent of them have half of all penile-vaginal sex. Erogenous mapping revealed a pronounced preference for the tip of the penis and the middle third of the ventral penile shaft among circumcised men. A long-legged teen with cubitus varus and shotty testicles was diagnosed with 49,XXXXY syndrome. Biologists studying *Lamprologus callipterus* identified the chromosomal difference between bourgeois males, who are large enough to lift the shells needed for female brooding, and dwarf males, who are small enough to sneak inside the shells and fertilize the females. Chinese researchers described the gonadal development of the dwarf surf clam, and astrophysicists discovered the tightest ultracool dwarf binary. Downregulation of Sonic Hedgehog signaling was found to promote genital warts.

Neanderthals roasted brown crabs in Gruta da Figueira Brava ninety thousand years ago, genetic taint from chickens has disrupted the red jungle fowl genome, and Vikings brought over their own animals in addition to stealing them from Britons. A *Coccocephalus wildi* fossil discovered in a coal mine in England a century ago was found to possess the oldest well-preserved vertebrate brain, and no evidence of evisceration was found among previously undisturbed crocodile mummies of varying quality at Qubbat al-Hawa. Dolphins whistle louder and longer to communicate over anthropogenic noise. An analysis of the feces of Japanese macaques in Kamikochi suggested the active predation of fishes. The common quail was suspected as an unknown reservoir of Toscana virus and sandfly fever Sicilian virus. The Alongshan virus, discovered five years ago in China, appeared in Swiss ticks. *Temnothorax rugatulus* rock ants combine systematic meandering with random walks to search for food. Mouthwear in crickets was compared with that of tyrannosaurids.

Researchers in Ireland asserted that there is no fetal microbiome; tiny bites of solid food reduce breastfeeding duration; and living near green environments increases the oligosaccharide diversity of a mother's milk. Xenobiotics that are likely to originate in personal care products were found in the vaginas of mothers who gave birth prematurely. American children may be poisoned by the makeup they use for playing dress-up. Parental separation leads to an increase in a child's unstructured time, and five different genetic variants increase the risk of nearsightedness the more schooling one receives. The administration of chemotherapy in the afternoon reduces female lymphoma patients' mortality rate by a factor of 12.5. Mpumalangans with HIV experience delayed melatonin release and shorter sleep cycles. Shenzhen adolescents left behind by their migrating parents have problems with their sleep and mental health. Climate change was found to be an important motivation for Polish antinatalists. The number of homes burned per square mile of wildfire in the American West is increasing. Mycotoxins were appearing frequently in Lebanese spices and nuts. ■

"99 Moons No. 151," "99 Moons No. 83," "99 Moons No. 60," by Claire A. Warden, whose work is on view as part of the exhibition Under the Sun and the Moon with Humble Arts Foundation © The artist

Science, with style.

Nautilus is a magazine of cutting-edge science, unraveled by the very brightest living thinkers.

Subscribe today.

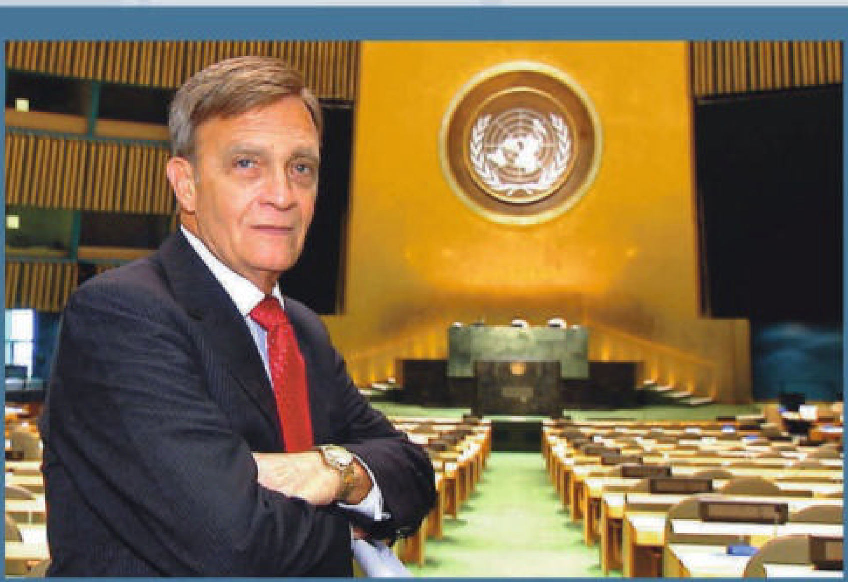
NAUTILUS

nautil.us @nautilusmag Use coupon code HARPERS for 15% off a subscription

GLOBAL CONNECTIONS TELEVISION
WITH BILL MILLER

Looking for an internationally-oriented talk show with access to the world's leading voices from the public and private sectors who discuss international issues that have local impact? Global Connections Television (GCTV) may fit into your programming very nicely! GCTV is the only program of its type in the world, and is provided to you at no-cost as a public service. You are invited to download any shows that would be of interest to your local audience, such as the general public or students, to mention only a few. You may request that your local PBS/community access television (CATV) media outlets air the Global Connections TV shows on a weekly basis.

GLOBAL CONNECTIONS
TELEVISION



Bill Miller is an accredited journalist at the UN for the Washington International and has written extensively on UN issues.

He is the Principal of Miller and Associates International Media Consultants, which created the Global Connection Television concept.

Bill developed an interest in international issues and the UN when he served as a US Peace Corps volunteer in the Dominican Republic. In his first year he worked as a community developer in a remote rural area; his second year he was Professor of Social Work at the Madre y Maestra University in Santiago, the country's second largest city.

GCTV features in-depth analysis within a wide scope of current issues, topics and events including:

• GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS • CLIMATE CHANGE • ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY • TECHNOLOGY •
• FOOD SECURITY • EDUCATION • RENEWABLE ENERGY • GENDER ISSUES • POVERTY REDUCTION •
• PEACE AND SECURITY • ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT • HEALTH •

Global Connections Television (GCTV) is an independently-produced, privately-financed talk show that focuses on international issues and how they impact people worldwide. Global Connections Television features in-depth analysis of important current issues and events including climate change, environmental sustainability, economic development, global partnerships, renewable energy, technology, culture, education, food security, poverty reduction, peace and security, and gender issues.

Episodes are broadcast worldwide through cable, satellite, public-access television, and the World Wide Web. GCTV provides inside perspectives from the United Nations and other important organizations that showcase how these groups impact the daily lives of people around the world.

GCTV GLOBAL CONNECTIONS
TELEVISION
WITH BILL MILLER

GCTV FOR BROADCASTERS, MEDIA OUTLETS & EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Within the goal of providing important perspectives and initiatives from the UN and other organizations, Global Connections Television is provided to broadcasters, satellite systems, media outlets and educational institutions at no charge subject to terms and conditions found on our website. GCTV believes that by providing this invaluable content, the public can learn more about the world, its issues, and the men and women making a difference.

WWW.GLOBALCONNECTIONSTELEVISION.COM
info@globalconnectionstelevision.com